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THE
IRON COUSIN;

OR,
MUTUAL INFLUENCE.

BY
MARY COWDEN CLARKE.

AUTHOR OF "THE GIRLHOOD OF SHAKESPEARE'S HEROINES," "THE COMPLETE
CONCORDANCE," ETC., ETC.

"For, note thou, Cynthia,
How Iron hath pow'r to rivet, and to weld
Into itself its kin: while, at the flint's
Appeal, its nature, cold and stern, kindles
To brilliancy and heat; its stubborn being, too,
Subdu'd.—obedient to the magnet's law.
So, from opposéd strengths, by mutual force,
Best sev'ral properties are born. By Love's
Own might of subtlety, what's good and true,
Is brought to highest truth, and crown'd perfection."

New Play

NEW YORK:
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1, 3, AND 5 BOND STREET
1882.

TO
MRS. VINCENT NOVELLO,
THE MOTHER,
WHOSE JUSTLY POTENT "INFLUENCE"
HAS NEVER BEEN EXERTED
BUT FOR THE TRUEST ADVANTAGE
OF HER HAPPY CHILDREN,

This Book is Dedicated,
IN DEEP GRATITUDE AND FERVENT AFFECTION,

BY
HER DAUGHTER,
THE AUTHOR.

THE IRON COUSIN.

CHAPTER I.

"A BABY that has got no mother, ma'am, God help it!"

The woman who held the child, and uttered these words, was a homely, middle-aged person, decently dressed, so far as an extreme cleanness could render tidy clothes that were in the last stage of darned decay. The infant she had in her arms was also scrupulously neat, for all its coarse mean wrappings. The woman's face wore a wistful, deprecating expression, as she curtsied and let fall these words in reply to a half-inquiring look, which she fancied she read in the countenance of one of the passers-by, a lady in a rich silk pelisse, carrying a thickly gilt book in her hand, as she passed up the street, glancing at the woman and baby who stood close in her way. The woman, as she spoke, had even advanced a step, as if somewhat to bar the passage, and claim attention to the appeal she made; but the lady swept on unheedingly, after her own passing glance, as though she had not heard the words by which it was responded to.

"I must speak up louder and bolder next time," muttered the woman. "Begging's a trade I never learned; and it seems it wants an apprenticeship, like any other calling. But for thee,

poppet," she added, leaning over the sleeping babe, "I must try and get the hard lesson off, though it's bad beginning at my time of life."

The wind moaned by in piercing, sudden gusts from the river, forming little sharp eddies in the wide thoroughfare that led up from the bridge. A fierce current of air drew round the thinly-clad woman and her burden, as she stood shivering and defenceless in the open way—one of those steep, hilly streets that abound in the good old town of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Heavy-laden carts staggered up the ascent, the horses straining and tugging and laboring with stretched harness and quivering shafts, as they tacked sideways along, their iron-shod hoofs slipping and striking sparks from beneath their shaggy fetlocks each time they vainly strove to plant a firm step; great wains tottered top-heavy, swaying to and fro, as they made their perilous descent, creaking and groaning, and leaving a broad, shiny track on one side behind them, marking the safely-impeding reluctance of the dropped drag; foot-passengers bent forward, breasting the cold wind and the toil of the up-hill progress, ever and anon stopping to whisk round and avoid the clouds of dust that whirled in their faces, peppering their clothes, dredging against their cheeks and foreheads, and sifting into their eyes. The heavy sails of the colliers and other craft lying moored in the river, flapped with unwieldy abruptness: while the little pennons that fluttered from the mast-heads, seemed giddy with their ceaseless, rapid motion. Straws were whirled into open entries, and shop-doors banged to with startling suddenness. There was a black sullen look in the air, partly the effect of the keen, savage-cutting wind—partly the effect of the dense coal-smoke atmosphere, perpetually hovering in a murky cloud, indispersible even by such a blast as then blew straight from the northeast. All was chill and gloomy; even the grocers and confectionery shops with which the place abounds—for tea and sugar-plums seem to form the chief nutriment of miners, to judge by the large japan canisters, and the piles of colored chalk and sugar, by courtesy called sweetmeats, that lie wedged and heaped in almost every other shop-window in New-

castle—could not enliven the general dreariness of the aspect of the spot on that harsh, cheerless day.

Yet still the woman lingered in the open street, and still she made an occasional courageous attempt to call the attention of the passers-by to the orphan charge she held in her arms.

Presently, a figure approached that fixed all her attention. It was a horseman; and came straight across the bridge, along the narrow street that led through the suburb of Gateshead from the open country beyond. He was dressed after the fashion of a gentleman—but unmistakably a country gentleman; for the scarlet coat, and white corduroys that he wore, looked like worsted apparel; he was carefully booted and spurred, and bore a heavy silver-mounted hunting-whip of antiquated make. He seemed a youngish man, and sat his horse like one accustomed to the saddle and to the pursuit of field sports. He held his head bent forward, with his hat over his eyes, to avoid the dust and driving wind, so that his face was concealed as he came onward; but there was something in his general appearance that from the first attracted the woman's notice, and kept it riveted upon him. As he approached, she drew nearer to the curb-stone, and stood there gazing intently.

At almost the same moment he had caught sight of her, and she had recognized him; each exclaiming, simultaneously,

“Martha!”

“The young 'Squire!”

“Tell me, Martha, tell me,” he began, impatiently, but seemed unable to proceed; only leaning from his horse, and looking eagerly into the woman's face.

She shook her head, appearing as little able as himself to speak. At length she said, “Best dismount, Mr. Harry, sir; and then you can step aside out of the throng with me, and—and—I can tell you all quietly, gently.”

He still kept looking wistfully at her in silence, but did as she suggested, mechanically throwing himself off his horse, and giving its rein into the hand of a lad who was hovering near in the hope of such a chance, with charge to lead it round to a certain inn he named, where he was staying.

He was scarcely on the pavement beside her, before he grasped the woman by the arm, drew her a little apart from the crowd of passers, and said, hoarsely, "Now tell me of Hetty. Where is she? Take me at once to her."

"Be patient, Mr. Harry, sir; take courage—bear up, sir; I have but poor news to tell."

"I feared as much. I knew she must have suffered—have gone through terrible scenes—so high-hearted, so proud of spirit as my poor Hetty! so unused to the world—so unequal to its struggles—so young, so inexperienced! But you, my good Martha, you did not leave her; you stayed by her—you helped her through all her troubles,—I know you did, did you not? You never forsook her at the worst; and now you shall take her comfort—you shall bring her brother to her. Come, lead me where she is. I'm prepared for a poor place; but she shall soon exchange it for a better. I have come to fetch her home,—home, Martha. We'll all set out for the old Hall, as soon as she can bear the journey."

He had talked himself into a hopeful strain; and by the time he spoke of home, and a return to it with her whom he came to seek, he looked with an attempted cheerful glance into Martha's face; but seeing its unchanged, mournful expression, he had added falteringly the words, "as soon as she can bear the journey;" and now, still farther added: "for I fear she is very ill—reduced—weak,—perhaps dangerously ill. For God's sake speak, Martha! Your manner makes me dread I know not what!"

"Look here, sir!" said the poor woman, at a loss how best to break to her young master the fatal truth she had to tell him. "Look here, Mr. Harry, sir; lift up the corner of my shawl, and see what I have in my arms."

He stared at her bewilderedly for one instant; then hastily put back the shawl. A baby's face lay nestled beneath; its eyes were closed; its breathing quick, but regular; its color rosy and healthful: all showed it to be in a deep, sweet sleep.

"Miss Hetty's child," the woman said, softly and sadly; then added, "Lord forgive me for saying so! when she had as

good a right to be a mother, as the honestest woman and best lady of them all. Mrs. Captain Ireton, I should have said, to be sure ; but my poor young mistress seemed always the same to me ; a girl—a child—the young thing I had nursed from her long-clothes. I managed to call her by her right name, her married name, to the folks here ; but seeing you, Mr. Harry, sir, made ‘ Miss Hetty ’ come quite natural. My darling child ! My sweet creature ! My dear young mistress ! ”

The tears that had been so long restrained, now poured down the cheeks of the faithful nurse ; and she burst into lamentations that left no doubt of the fatal truth. The ‘ Squire had till then striven to hide from himself the extent of his fears ; he could believe his sister ill, in want, starving, dying,—any thing but actually dead ; now, the words that fell from Martha in her passion of grief, destroyed the last delusive hope. He understood, at length, in its bare, naked horror, the fact that his beloved Hetty—his young sister—the companion of his boyhood—the joy of his youth—the pride of his manly years, was past all comfort, all help—that he had come too late—that she was no longer in being.

“ It’s too true, Mr. Harry, sir ! Her bold, brave spirit bore her up against the old ‘ Squire’s pitiless usage for a long time ; but she gave way at last. When her young husband fell sick, and died suddenly, her courage had its first blow. Then came poverty ; and she, needing at that time more than ever, the comforts and luxuries she’d been used to all her young days ! Getting no answer to that last letter she wrote to old master, brought her lower and lower, and at length broke her heart. She moped and pined, though she’d never own how she cared one bit for all that had come about ; and when we got poorer and poorer, and were obliged to leave the cottage out yonder, for a cheaper lodging in the close town, she made believe she didn’t feel the change,—but she did. I saw her face get whiter and thinner, and her poor eyes get hollower and hollower, till at last they were so sunk in her head that they only looked large because her cheeks were so wasted. She never seemed herself after we came to live in that

stifling hole, and I knew then how it must be, though I tried to keep up a cheerful face to her. I think she had a fancy too, herself, how it was with her, for she once asked me,—in a voice as like her old merry one as she could make it,—‘Nurse, d’ye think my baby will ever be born alive?’ And when I said ‘Yes, sure, my own darling Miss Hetty, and will be a joy and a comfort to you yet, to make up for all that’s past and gone;’ she only shook her head, and spoke no more for a minute or two; and then she said quite sudden like, ‘Well, if it live, you’ll take care of it, and be as good a nurse-mother to it as you have always been to me, Matty Pattykin, won’t you?’ And then I knew—for all she spoke so gay and careless in her tone, and for all the old playful name she always called me by,—that she felt she’d never live to be a mother to her babe herself. True enough! It was born in the deep, dark night,—and as the morning broke, my darling Miss Hetty died in these very arms. I understood what she meant, though she couldn’t speak—but her look was enough—it reminded me of the promise between us about her baby. I think she made out that I understood her, for I could speak no more than herself,—as her face turned quite calm, and its own bright happy look of old times came over it, and so it remained till she died; and there it lies still, so peaceful, so sweet, and so mild, so young and so innocent, you might almost believe it has a smile upon it. I couldn’t shed one tear then, though I cry so now; my heart felt swelled and aching, as if it had a heavy weight upon it, and my head felt bursting; but I went about what I had to do as if I was stupid. I smoothed her dear young limbs, and covered them with her own white dressing-gown, and laid over her darling face her last cambric handkerchief—all the things we had left of what I had tried so hard to keep for her, when one piece of clothing after another had to be parted with, to get her a little gruel or tea, whenever she could be got to take it—for she always pretended she wanted nothing, and was neither hungry nor thirsty, though I knew fast enough she must be both. But now, though she would never want sup nor bit more, her baby would; and there must be some help got somehow for it, poor lamb! So in

desperation, yet all along stupefied and dull like,—as if I had no feeling ever since, I think,—I took up my darling Miss Hetty's child in my arms, and came out this morning on a wild errand to find hope and help. Praised be His name, that sent it to me in you yourself, Mr. Harry, sir! Little did I think when I left that room, all silent and bare, with only my poor darling stretched there, cold and pale, lying all by herself, with no one to watch by her,—not even her faithful Matty, who hoped never, never to leave her so long as she was above ground,—little did I think with whom I should return to it!"

"And where is it? Take me at once to it—to her!" exclaimed the 'Squire, huskily, as he raised his face from between his hands, where he had held it buried, while the worthy nurse poured forth her sad history.

"It is just by—in the nearest chare; this way, Mr. Harry, sir."

"In a chair!" muttered the 'Squire, half unconsciously, as if he thought the poor woman's trouble had turned her head, to talk of a lodging in a chair.

"Ay, Mr. Harry, sir: a chare. They call them chares here, these close alleys, that lead up from the water-side; a dismal place for our bright Miss Hetty to live in! A miserable place for her young body to lie dead in!

The nurse led on for a little way, and then turned from the spot where they had stood, into a narrow passage that opened from the street in which they were. It ascended by steps, and wound up through the houses on either side, a sort of out-of-door staircase. Almost every step was thickly occupied with boots and shoes of all dimensions, ranged side by side, evidently for sale; for the houses which flanked the steps had low-browed, dingy shops, in the windows of which heaps more of the same articles were just discernible through the dusty, darkened atmosphere. These boots and shoes presented every diversity of cobbled, patched and pieced decrepitude; every varied make of hob-nailed, iron-heeled, list, leather, and wooden; there was the child's ankle-strapped shoe, the boy's tongued and thick-soled school-boot, with

its lace of leather, and its leathern binding; the youth's clouted brogue; the ploughman's stout high-low; the townsman's "new-footed calf Wellington;" women's clogs and pattens; and wood on shoes innumerable, such as are rife in French fishing-towns,—clumsy, rough-hewn things—some entirely of wood, some with upper leathers nearly as inflexible as wood, and fastenings of rude metal clasps. These wooden shoes were of all sizes, from such as seemed fit only for the stunted dimensions of a Chinese lady's foot, but were in reality intended for the soft, small, plump foot of babyhood, up to the full-grown wagoner's or miner's wear, looking like moderate-sized hip or slipper baths.

Making his way through all this myriad cordwainery, though little heeding its precise nature, the 'Squire, as he followed the nurse on her upward way, was yet conscious of the suffocating atmosphere generated by all these agglomerated boots and shoes, and he felt the close-pent, overhanging aspect of the place, in oppressive keeping with the effect upon his senses. As he instinctively looked up towards the sky, for a glimpse of space, and a breath of fresh air, he saw the massive stone walls of the castle or jail, frowning and beetling above the summit of the steep winding chare; and it seemed only a crowning circumstance in the images of confined, breathless, hopeless imprisonment, that surrounded him on all sides.

As they entered the one of these shop-dens, above which was the chamber they sought, there was superadded to the other odours of the spot, a strong whiff of beef-steak and onions, upon a steaming dish of which, the owner of the dwelling was about to regale, in company with his wife and family; and the 'Squire saw the nurse suddenly stagger, gasp and turn pale, as she was about to say a few words, before she passed on up stairs. She reeled, and would have fallen, had not the woman of the house started forward to her assistance, with feminine instinct, first catching the baby from her arms.

"It's my opinion, it's the smell of the victuals, sir," said the master of the shop, turning to the 'Squire in explanation. "To the best of my belief, she ain't touched solid food for days; nor

nothing at all, but what my good woman has forced upon her under the pretence of a neighbourly cup o' tea. She plied her with the bread and butter, making believe she didn't see how bad she wanted it; for she was high, and besides she know'd we was poor ourselves, and so she always put a good face on her own starving, while she worked her fingers to the bone to prevent her young missus's. I beg pardon, sir; but if you're a friend, I'm glad you've come, for they're in a sad strait. The poor young body couldn't hold out no longer, but died, sir; and as for this one, it speaks for itself, that things must be at a hard pass with her, when the smell of meat is so scarce that it upsets her."

The 'Squire, in a few words, explained who he was; and commending the faithful nurse to the best care of the good people of the house, proceeded up stairs, alone, to the chamber where his young sister lay dead in her early prime.

CHAPTER II.

OLD 'Squire Heathcote, of Heathcote Hall, was a man remarkable for two things,—excessive obstinacy and excessive precision. A dictum of his, once pronounced, was irrevocable, and to be abided by at all events. If he had by any unfortunate chance happened to have said: "I'll be shot if it isn't," relative to a certain matter that turned out contrary to what he had asserted, he might have been capable of ordering himself out into the court-yard, with his gamekeepers drawn up in array to shoot him on the spot.

His wife was, happily, the most uncontradictory and submissive of women. She had meekly married him, and after meekly bearing him two children, had meekly lived some few years, and then—meekly died.

As is common with people of his character, 'Squire Heathcote was a man of small mind. His obstinacy and preciseness were

conjoined with a limited range of thoughts and sentiments. He was stubbornly bigoted, and stiff-neckedly opinionated. He had certain fixed ideas—if ideas they may be called—which were rather notions; vague in their scope, but immutable in their decision. His faculties were not powerful but headstrong; his understanding not forcible but pertinacious. He had a sort of tautology of mind; his narrow sphere of intelligence producing veriest repetition of the same images. He had his son christened Henry,—which was his own name, and when he had a daughter born to him, he had called her Henrietta from sheer lack of intellectual energy, and disinclination towards any fresh exercise of the imagination. His favourite oath was, “By the Lord Harry!” and his usual denunciation, “Go to old Harry!” He converted pleasures into penalties, by the monotonous style of their appointed recurrence. He would always have a certain kind of party on a certain date, a ball on such a day, a dinner-party on such another,—with exactly the same several sets of guests invited to each.

He would have considered it almost an act of moral delinquency to omit having roast leg of mutton at his table on a particular day in each week; though it sometimes involved a servant’s galloping over to the next town in a pelting rain—the distress of a horse—the distraction of the butcher, whose usual supply of meat had failed—and the agitation and anxiety of his meek wife lest his lordly will should be inevitably thwarted. He would have deemed it a breach of religious duty to have any thing but roast beef and plum pudding on Christmas day; he made it a scruple of conscience that pancakes should be served on Shrove Tuesday; and would have considered it little less than a crime not to eat salt fish on Ash Wednesday.

He kept all the clocks in the house regular to a second with his own hand; although he made no use of his time, or frittered it away, as if it were the least valuable of his possessions; as perhaps it was.

He was highly incensed if the post did not come in, and the letter-bag were not placed on the breakfast-table punctually to a moment; though he had no correspondence he cared about, and

invariably put off reading his newspapers till evening. This he contrived to make another periodical pest; for, like many despotic readers of newspapers, he always read them aloud. Not satisfied with the amusement he derived from their perusal, he insisted on making hearers of whatever luckless persons chanced to be by, however otherwise their attention might be engaged. He liked to have an audience. He chose to have an interest taken in his "extraordinary growth of turnips," and "strawberries of prodigious size." If his wife were anxious to slip away and give some forgotten order to the housekeeper, upon which she knew depended the important question of dinner (and consequent peace) for the next day, she must sit still and listen to a long political debate, of which she understood not one word; or if his young daughter were deep in the calculation of knotting stitches, she must "lose count," to mark the particulars of a "melancholy accident," or attend to the details of "a grand boxing match," for neither of which she cared one jot.

He turned luxuries into inflictions by his method of dispensing, withholding or controlling them. He invested them with so many petty restrictions, so many stiff observances, so many troublesome punctilios—which were by no means to be infringed—that people gave up availing themselves of the indulgences in sheer despair at the concomitant annoyances. Although no reader, he prided himself on a fine library, a choice collection of books that he possessed. It had been the cherished acquisition of an ancestor of his, who had had taste and judgment sufficient for its selection, as well as its enjoyment. Not only as a family heir-loom was it a source of gratification to our 'Squire, but as affording him exercise for his love of precision. He regularly ordered new publications from town, adding them carefully and chronologically to the rest. He was very nice in their binding; and would send a book back to London to be rebound, if its style were not accurately to his fancy. He would spend whole mornings in his library, arranging the volumes; not reading them. He was very particular about their matching, and ranging exactly and evenly on the shelves. He hated to see gaps;

worried while one existed; would search for the missing tome and if he discovered that it had been fetched away for perusal, would be restless during its absence, and fidget about the person who happened to be reading it. If it were his meek wife, she soon discovered the object of his uneasiness, and dutifully put a period to it, by silently and immediately restoring the stray to its place. If it were his light-hearted daughter, she played with his fidgetiness, pretended not to see its aim, taking neither hint nor innuendo; and when she could no longer feign ignorance of his meaning, she would affect to be weary of the book herself, and, half yawning, half laughing, carry it back to the study, and pop it up on the shelf carelessly as might be.

As for his son, having originally no bent for literature, he came to hate the sight of books, as perpetually associated with some objection, or admonition, or teasing interposing of authority on the part of his father, and accordingly gave them up as a hopeless pursuit, and gave himself up to the more congenial prosecution of his favourite field sports. In his personal conformation, he was strong and athletic. In his mental constitution he was somewhat supine. In him were modified the characteristics he inherited from both parents. His mother's meek spirit in him became mere passive acquiescence with his father's will; while this latter's precision and obstinacy took the shape of habitual compliance and dogged obedience. He had a rooted dislike to opposition, and was, both by temperature and circumstance, mild and yielding. Young 'Squire Heathcote, or Mr. Harry, as he was most frequently styled, was a general favourite with household, tenantry, and neighbourhood.

Towards his son and heir the formal old 'Squire entertained a mixed feeling. He took a certain sort of pride in him as the future representative of himself, the inheritor of his estate, his family greatness, his county honours and consequence, his entire possessions; but he had at the same time a kind of little jealousy of him, a paltry eagerness to display his present authority over him, a ceaseless desire to maintain a continuance of his power and a fretful besetting mistrust of the period when the young man would be emancipated from both.

Of all living beings 'Squire Heathcote best loved his daughter Henrietta, or Hetty, as she was familiarly called. After his wife died, his affection for the young girl took a more demonstrative shape than any he had ever exhibited. He would almost brook something less than implicit submission from her. He tolerated her sprightly insubordination, and connived at her lively freedoms. She would gaily disregard all indirect suggestions of his; and if an absolute command threatened, she would laugh it off. Her father humoured her more than any one in the world; and to prevent this indulgence from interfering with his law of irreversible decree, he evaded as much as possible pronouncing any in her case, and rarely issued a mandate that regarded her till he was pretty sure it stood no chance of being disobeyed. She, like most spoilt people, was not slow to perceive her power over him; and she was both fond and proud of its exercise; but her mode was ever so pleasant and sportive, that, far from resenting the ascendancy, he but doted the more on his subduer. Besides, there was a kind of will in submitting to hers; he *willed* to be swayed by his pretty daughter, his favourite child.

There was only one occasion when he had a suspicion that she had succeeded in pursuing her own way rather than his, to an extent that he would never have permitted, had he known the exact circumstances in time. There was a Mr. Morton Worthington, son and heir to a neighbouring country gentleman, of good birth and ancient descent, who possessed the finest estate in the county. There existed a distant relationship between the two families of Worthington and Heathcote, which the 'Squire hoped to see brought into still nearer alliance by a marriage between Morton and his own daughter Henrietta. But Mr. Morton Worthington was a young man of reserved manners, grave, stately, self-concentrated; and though he betrayed unmistakable evidence of his being irresistibly captivated by the sparkling Hetty, yet he never gave sufficiently-declared tokens of his attachment to warrant his being looked upon as her suitor. Squire Heathcote, hoping all must eventually take place as he had pro

ordained in his own mind, left things to time ; but suddenly, and without his being able to account for the abrupt secession, Mr. Morton Worthington left home, and returned again in a few weeks, accompanied by a bride, as opposed in every particular of feature, person, and disposition, to the lively blooming Hetty, as could possibly be conceived.

'Squire Heathcote could never verify his surmise, but he had his own misgivings that this match had been actually within the power of his daughter, and that she, in her gay heedlessness or wilfulness, had chosen to let it escape her. He fancied that Mr. Morton Worthington had been surprised into an accidental avowal of his feelings, and that Hetty had on the spot rejected him ; but it was then too late to inquire into the facts, and his pride would not allow him to own, even to himself, that he was disappointed.

Nevertheless it rankled long within him, and it was doubtless this secret vexation at the defeat of his original views for her disposal, which added a sting to the virulence of his anger, when he discovered that at a county ball, given by some officers who were quartered in the neighbourhood, one of them had dared to fall in love with his daughter, and intended to make proposals for her. His ire knew no bounds ; he raged, he stormed, he vowed the rascally beggarly scoundrel should never come near his house ; that no pitiful half-pay captain should have his child ; that he would lock her up, to starve on bread and water, if she so much as thought of encouraging the vagabond, &c., &c.

Hetty at first smiled and coaxed, and tried to win her father into better humour ; then she pouted, and in youthful pettishness declared she could not, and she would not live without the lover of her choice, threatening to die and leave her old father, purely to vex and shame him for having been so hard with her. But soon she found it was no jesting matter. The 'Squire was seized with one of his obstinate fits, and swore by the Lord Harry she should never have Captain Ireton by his consent. Hetty, presuming on her influence with her father, and trusting that when once she was a wife, he would not refuse his forgiveness, in an evil hour resolved to forego this consent, and to marry Captain

Ireton without it. She had no difficulty in persuading her attached nurse to accompany her in her elopement; Matty could deny her beloved Miss Hetty nothing; and accordingly one fine June night they made their escape from an open window, hurried across the old park, found Captain Ireton waiting for them with a post-chaise and four, which soon conveyed the runaway daughter away from Heathcote Hall for ever.

The 'Squire's wrath on the discovery was fearful. He took a solemn oath that he would never pardon, never see his daughter more. He called his Maker to witness that he would never forgive any one of his family who should hold intercourse with her. Hemenaced, not only with disinheritance, but with an eternal curse, his only son, should he ever communicate with her who had made herself an outcast from among them. Harry Heathcote—partly from habitual submission, partly from believing that his sister would ultimately succeed in winning her way back to her old place in her father's heart, and knowing that her own unaided influence had always had more effect than when seconded by the interference of others, which seemed rather to provoke and confirm resistance—yielded to the fiat.

But months crept on, and still her brother heard nothing of Hetty. Her name was interdicted at Heathcote Hall, therefore he dared not ask his father tidings, lest he should but exasperate him more against her. He knew that letters occasionally reached his father, addressed in her handwriting, but he learned nothing of their contents, until one fatal day, in a burst of passion at some neglect or omission of his steward's, the old 'Squire had an apoplectic fit, which, bringing him to his death-bed, he had called his son to him, and in an agony of tardily-awakened remorse, had shown him Hetty's letters, and desired him, with as articulate an injunction as his paralyzed utterance would permit, to hasten in search of his sister, and bear her her father's dying forgiveness. This was an expiring effort of natural feeling to assert its supremacy over inveterate obstinacy—a struggle the old man did not long survive, for he had scarcely given the charge to his son before he breathed his last.

The young 'Squire lost no time in fulfilling the behest. His first step was to endeavour to trace out from her letters the latest retreat of poor Hetty, for they bore evidence of her having been compelled, from increasing distress and penury, frequently to change it. He found that the last-received letter bore the post-mark of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and that inside it contained mention of her lodging being situated in its vicinity; but this was vaguely stated, as if the writer's thoughts were far more intently fixed upon the old, well-loved home, of which she raved in fond imploring terms, and to which she distractedly besought leave to return.

He had set forth on horseback, with this slender clue, to seek his sister. On reaching the neighbourhood of the great coal-city, he had been induced, by its name, to try first the Ouse Burn, knowing his sister's predilection for rural quiet, and fancying the title of this suburb indicated the kind of spot she would probably choose for her lodging. But he had hardly entered its precincts before he felt that the promise of its name was utterly misleading. This was the only remnant of whatever former beauty the place might have possessed. The sole trace now existing of the burn or brook which had originally streamed through it, was a dirty mud-ditch, foul and noisome, trickling its sluggish ooze between rows of straggling low houses, or huts. The way was strewn with refuse of all sorts; iron hoops, tub-staves, broken palings, cinders, old shoes with gaping sides—the upper leathers wrenched apart, and the soles curled up; a bit of a thin and ragged petticoat; a rusty pot-lid bent nearly double; a few yards farther on, the saucepan itself, full of holes, and a piece of a cracked yellow delf plate, with a crinkly edge. Quitting this region of squalor, he had proceeded as far, in the same direction, as the pretty, secluded, green dell of Jesmond Dean. Here he had succeeded in gaining something like an indication of the object of his pursuit. He found that a young lady calling herself Mrs. Ireton, dressed in widow's weeds, and accompanied by a middle-aged woman, had tenanted a couple of apartments in one of the neat cottages skirting the embowered cleft. But, unable

to pay even the moderate weekly sum demanded for rent, she had left, very reluctantly it seemed, both on the part of housekeeper and tenant, for other lodgings, more within the compass of her scanty means. The good woman of the house spoke kindly and regretfully of the poor young widow lady and her faithful companion; saying that they were quiet, uncomplaining bodies, and that the latter especially was a helpful, sonsy, weel-behaved, canny sort of a person, who thought nothing too good or too choice for her young mistress, whilst she herself was content with any thing she could get.

After this, the 'Squire wandered on day after day, now on the great North Road, now on the Western Road, now on the old London Road, inquiring at all the cottages, and asking at all the poorest houses that seemed in any way likely to have accommodated lodgers. Frequently he heard the bell of the fine old church of St. Nicholas chime a late evening hour, as he returned, toil-worn of body, and far more weary of spirit, to his sleeping-quarters at the Inn in the town. His horse seemed to wonder why his master preferred the steep streets of Newcastle, varied only by a monotonous, slow perambulation about the outlets leading from the town, to the former free gallops along the dewy sward of the park, or the animated course after the hounds. But the 'Squire was too spiritless and sad, even to address his wonted word of sympathy or kindness to his horse. In silence, and in growing hopelessness, the brother pursued his search; until one forenoon, by some caprice of intention, for which he could scarce have accounted, had it been questioned, he turned his horse's head from the direction of the London Road, whither he had first been proceeding, and came straight back through Gateshead, across the Tyne bridge, into the town; where, the first object he encountered, was Martha, with Hetty's new-born child in her arms.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN the nurse returned to her recollection, after the deep swoon into which exhaustion of body and mind had combined to throw her, she would have scarcely been persuaded to remain and recover herself fully, ere she sought her young master, had she not remembered that his grief would probably prefer solitude and unwitnessed vent in its first burst of natural emotion. But when a considerable space elapsed, and she heard no token of his leaving the chamber, she crept up to the door, and tapping gently, went in.

She found him sitting by the bedside, his head buried in one arm, which was resting upon the pillow that supported the marble face of his young sister,—that face which he had never beheld otherwise than blooming in health, and smiles, and careless heart-ease. It was now still and serene; but it was worn and sunken, and deeply lined with the traces of premature age—that age forced upon youth by a harsh acquaintance with want, anxiety, and bitter experiences. It was the countenance of a young creature under twenty, made to wear the indent of cares, and faded illusions, and extinct hopes, which should only furrow the cheeks of fourscore, when it has learned a higher and more peaceful hope, to supply the fond bright visions, which are the rightful portion of youth. It was a face stricken suddenly old, by rigor and relentless will; a girlish face sent to the grave with the mark of years upon it, dug there by the inflexibility of a parent's resentment.

The impress of the cruel truth he read in that sweet sad face, sank deeply and ineffaceably into the heart of the brother; and as the faithful nurse laid her hand upon his shoulder, with few simple words bidding him take comfort from the thought that he had the child of her they looked upon, to protect and live for, he vowed within himself sacredly and solemnly that his sister's in

fant girl should never know a harsh word, or unkind deed, from him, her adopted father. He resolved that severity should never inflict upon her the tortures it had wrought her mother; and determined that from whatever source unhappiness might hereafter be destined to reach her, it should not, at all events, owe its origin to austere treatment. He took the babe gently in his arms. while, with his eyes fixed upon that mournful dead face, he raised the rosy living one to his own, and touched it with his lips, as he registered the vow within his own soul.

The 'Squire was a quiet-mannered, undemonstrative man; and, to judge from his demeanour, on his return home, few would have guessed the deep sorrow that had been his during that interval of absence. He fell into his old habits; pursued his hunting and sporting with the same apparent zest and relish as before; was the same even-tempered, cheerful-spirited, simply-behaved, and simply-spoken being as ever. He took delight in renewing his companionship with his old associates, and in welcoming them heartily to a house of which he was now sole, undisputed, and uncontrolled master. His hospitality was genial, frank, and easy. He was never better pleased, than after a hard day's run, to see assembled round his board the sharers of his toils and his glories in the field. Like most of his race, he was a stanch devotee to the pleasures of the table. He ate with the proverbial appetite of a hunter; and drank with proportionate vigour "a cup of ale," "a cool tankard," "a draught of good old October," "a bumper of claret," or "a tumbler of rich, warm, fruity wine, nicely mulled and spiced, just the last thing to send us all snug and comfortable to bed," were among the tempting titles by which the 'Squire was never at a loss to press upon his guests and himself a seasonable glass. The complacency with which they would quaff huge goblets of foaming March beer, as accompaniments to vast slices of cold beef, for breakfast, on a sharp frosty morning, at chilliest and earliest day-dawn, was something wonderfully invigorating. The boisterous alacrity with which they sat down to table, and fell to at the fish, flesh, and fowl, pie and pasty, joints of roast and boiled, with high-heaped

piles of smoking vegetables, flanked by port and sherry, strong ale, small beer, and crowning bowls of punch, proclaimed their giant capacities for the enjoyment of the good cheer, with a force that would have inspired sympathetic relish in one who had just dined.

The only period in the twenty-four hours during which the 'Squire's even temper was ever known to discover something of an abated patience, was the expectant half-hour that precedes the serving of dinner. He would walk about his large drawing-room, half restless, half listless, with the air of a man who could settle to nothing, and knew not what to do with himself. He would lounge in the deep window-seat, drumming his fingers against the panes and looking vacantly out across the park, come back to the hearth rug, stand with his legs wide-stretched, and his back towards the fire, with balancing toes and heels, and upturned coat-tails, bite his nails, play with the bell-pull, stir the fire, or twirl the old-fashioned India screen round and round between his finger and thumb, then fling himself into an arm-chair, with a yawn like one of his own hounds gaping.

Once, in his ruffled abstraction, he chanced to ring the bell, with some scarce-formed intention of desiring them to see if dinner could not be hurried, or if the clocks were not slow, or if the cook had not fallen asleep, when, instead of the expected servant who usually answered the summons, in walked Matty with her little charge in her arms.

The 'Squire, with a bachelor's instinctive diffidence of his powers as a nurse, had hitherto seen but little of his baby niece. He shared the feeling of most unmarried men with regard to children of that age. He fancied its neck looked insecure, and as if its head would roll off, were he to attempt to dandle it. He had a momentary dread of its slipping out of his arms, and entertained a secret perpetual fear that at an unexpected instant it might begin to scream. He had, therefore, appointed a set of airy apartments, rather remote from his own than otherwise, as its nursery, installing Martha as head-nurse, and investing her with full power to order any and everything needful for the accommodation

of baby Kate; but, contenting himself with these provisions for her welfare, he had quietly made up his mind to put off till a more seasonable opportunity any personal communication with herself. But nurse Matty did not entirely approve of such an arrangement. Although it left all things to her judgment and experience, and although it involved no neglect of baby's essential advantage, yet it betokened a default of interest in the little one's growth and appearance, and increase of intelligence, that could not be reconciled with what a doting nurse conceived to be its due. She wanted its uncle to see how well it throve; to see its pretty ways; to be charmed by its winning innocence; to learn to love it, and prize it, and fondle it, as so perfect a darling deserved. And to say truth, it was a lovely little creature, very beautiful in shape, in face and in movement. Its well-rounded, flexible limbs; its regular features, dimpled cheeks, and waxen complexion; its bright, curly hair; with a sprightly, alert grace in its every look and gesture, denoted that a few months had insensibly changed it from new-born helplessness and passiveness into the individuality and attractiveness of an interesting child.

Its appearance, borne by Matty, was the signal for a general view-halloo from the assembled sportsmen, loud, sharp, and ringing enough to have startled an ordinary child into a roar of dismay; but baby Kate crowed and danced, and leaped in the nurse's arms, as though she enjoyed the noise and delighted in the brilliant red coats that surrounded her. The shout of welcome was repeated again and again, while the gentlemen gathered about the pretty child, asking laughing questions about her of their host, and each making advances to take her from the nurse.

"Gently, gently, gentlemen," said the latter; "you'll frighten her, mayhaps, if you crowd round her so, and take her suddenly away from me she's used to."

But the little one seemed nowise alarmed; only hugging rather closer to Matty, while she continued to eye the scarlet-coated buntsmen into smiles of evident approval.

"Why, where in the name of all that's dainty, did you pick up this bright-eyed chick, 'Squire? Where did you find her? Where

have you hidden her all this time? How comes it that we've never heard of this pretty moppet of yours? For I suppose she is yours, you sly dog you," said one of them.

"She's mine,—my niece; my sister Hetty's child,—mine now," said the 'Squire, in his quiet way.

But there was that in his tone, which made the loud voices round him hush upon the instant, and there was a momentary pause of respect and sympathy throughout the room.

Presently the former speaker resumed: "By Jove, she's a beauty! It's a sin never to have let us see her before! What a pair of eyes she has! What execution they'll do by and by, eh?"

He would have pinched the child's cheek, as he concluded, but she drew away from the approaching finger and thumb, with a little air, as if disdaining the familiarity.

The gentleman laughed, and turned on his heel, saying, "Coy already, by Jove!"

There was a spice of mortification in his tone, but it wore off, and his laugh became more genuine as he observed that another gentleman, who stood next him, and attempted to take hold of the plump little baby hand, was repulsed in a similar manner. Several of the huntsmen now, in succession, trying to establish a farther intimacy between themselves and the child, were treated in the same style; and they were mightily amused to see how steadily she thus kept them all at a distance, although she preserved her smiling looks of approbation and admiration, which were clearly directed to their bright-coloured dresses, not to themselves.

"Try you, 'Squire!" at length one of them exclaimed. "See if you have better luck than we! Try whether she'll come to you!"

The 'Squire, advancing with a sort of shy smile, and hesitatingly confident manner, held out his arms towards her, saying, "Will ye come to your uncle, Katey?"

The bright-eyed child looked wistfully into his face for a moment; then leaned forward to be taken.

The 'Squire grasped her to him in silence, sat down upon the nearest chair, nestled her head against his breast, and pressed his lips upon her hair with closed eyes and quivering mouth.

After that day, little Kate Ireton was regularly brought down during the half-hour before dinner, to visit her uncle and his guests. It was not only for the sake of beguiling that wearisome interval by her presence, that she was appointed to make her appearance then, instead of the more usual period of dessert, but it was from some instinct that her pure bright innocence better assorted with the former calm and temperate time, than with the heated vinous atmosphere of feasting, and lights, and uproarious conviviality that followed dinner, which caused the 'Squire to have his little niece brought to him previously.

She became a general favourite with the boisterous but good-hearted country gentlemen who formed the 'Squire's usual company. They admired the beautiful child, and played with her, as they would have done with a toy. They were always highly amused with the little airs of consequence she gave herself; the wayward dignity, the disdainful caprices, the pettishnesses, the scorns, the pouting angers, the smiling snatches, the frowning flings, authoritative nods and head-tossings, were alternately curious and entertaining. She was most frequently placed on a table in the midst of them, with her uncle's arm passed round her; and here she would sit, as on a throne, dispensing petulant favours and whimsical displeasures. She would throw flowers at one, push away another, nod at a third, frown at a fourth, make a dart at the hair of a fifth, and smack the cheek of a sixth, when it approached too near to her little ladyship's, in an attempt to gain a kiss. This was a complaisance she never accorded. She would never give a kiss to any one but her uncle. If by stratagem or superior strength one were snatched from her, she violently resented it; her little hand clenched, her bit of a mouth contracted, and her eye flashed haughtily and wrathfully; and when this was received with peals of laughter, she only looked the more gravely angry.

Sometimes, when she was in high good humour, she would

sign to be seated on her uncle's knee—the only knee she ever consented to occupy—and would place her little white, fat, spread hand, palm downwards, on the table. This they knew was a signal for a bout at a childish game—a favourite pastime of hers—and it was pretty to see all those giant-grown hands clasping one after the other, a mounting heap, over the baby one which they lightly buried beneath them; and then to see the little one steal out, whip smartly up, and triumphantly place itself on the top of the mound of hands, then gradually become whelmed and lost among the ever-rising tide of great palms, till it would shyly dart out, before its time, and unfairly striving for supremacy against all order, would bring on the final scramble of dashing, pawing, foining, intermingling hands, that caused the crowning laugh of excitement and glee which crowned the whole.

She was made much of, and doted on by them all; a perfect child-queen, surrounded by grown subjects, each one devoted to her will. She ruled with despotic sway; her humours their sole guide. They vied with each other who should most pet and indulge her. The one who was oftenest the object of her ill-usage deemed himself best distinguished.

“I never met with such a spirited little devil in the whole course of my life!” exclaimed one of the gentlemen enthusiastically, as he held his handkerchief to his lip, which had just been scratched, in a struggle for a caress he had perseveringly teased to obtain. “Confound me if I ever did!—never! She's worth her weight in gold, that she is, the delicious little termagant!”

Praised on all hands, yielded to by every one, ministered to by the servants, cherished by her uncle, idolized by her nurse, she was the centre of attention and deference from all around her. It is dangerous for a child to be the object of exclusive care and fondness to one person; but to be that of several grown persons is almost infallibly detrimental. The little creature gains an undue notion of its own consequence; it learns to consider itself and its welfare, its wants and its wishes, of paramount importance; it insensibly becomes wilful and dictatorial—well if not selfish and exacting.

Kate Ireton, before she could speak, learned how to enforce obedience, and became accustomed to see it follow her commands; before she could walk, gained the knowledge that a stamp of her foot carried authority with it, and that her every step was worshipped; before she mastered her letters, could read in the faces of all around her that she had the power of controlling their wills, and of making them subservient to her own. Hazardous convictions for a little girl scarce beyond babyhood to have acquired. They rendered her not exactly domineering, but something extremely akin to it; not precisely imperious, but very nearly so; neither hard nor unfeeling, but simply unmindful of others. She was so habituated to behold herself the sole consideration to those about her, that she insensibly learned to look upon herself in the same light as the principal person to be considered. She never intentionally wounded them, or hurt their self-love, or demanded unconscionably of them; she was merely heedless, disregardful, unnoting of themselves—their feelings, their condition of mind or body. She would neither have mortified nor have over-fatigued a servant willingly, by any undue or excessive service required of them; but she often thoughtlessly risked doing both, by the implicit way in which fealty was tendered on their part, and accepted on hers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE park and demesnes of Heathcote Hall were not extensive, but were very beautiful. The ground was broken and varied; there were oak and beech coppices, where the birds sang and built, undisturbed; hawthorn brakes, in which trout streams sparkled; and fern covers, amid which pheasants lurked, and where rabbits might be seen popping forth from their burrows at eventide, or scampering and bundling back to them, on the least sound of approach.

It was a favourite recreation of little Kate Ireton's, to make her nurse take her out in the park, that they might wander the live-long day among its most leafy nooks, and explore its deepest embowered recesses.

When the child first learned to use its feet, Matty would try and induce her to walk upon the soft greensward, by her side. But the little one soon discovered that walking was more tiring than being borne in Matty's arms; accordingly at every ten paces she would stop, saying, "I want to be carried; take me up, Nursey!"

If Nursey just suggested that "walking was so pretty; and that Katey had better walk on a little way," Katey would retort flatly that "walking was ugly; that she didn't like walking; and that she wouldn't walk." Whereupon Matty might perhaps go so far as to hint that she "had a bone in her arm; that poor Nursey was tired; oh, so tired!" Then Katey would rejoin, clinging round Matty's skirts, "And I'm so tired; oh, so tired! Do take me up, Nursey!" This plea, and the coaxing, imploring emphasis on the "do," always carried the point; and Matty would go on till she was ready to drop before she ventured to set her burden down again.

Once the good 'Squire chanced to meet them in one of their rambles; and observing how heated and wearied the nurse looked, he said, "Katey grows too big to be carried now; you should let her walk, Martha. It will do her good."

"I don't like walking," said Katey. "And my Nursey likes to carry me, don't ye, Nursey?"

"That I do, darling, for a bit; but sometimes my old bones ache sooner than I'd have 'em. More shame for 'em, when you want to be carried, my own ducky!"

The 'Squire took his little niece in his arms, saying, as he did so, "Here, I'll carry Katey for you! She grows such a fine, stout lass now, that, bless me, she's no slight weight."

The next morning, when Matty and her charge were about to set forth for their morning stroll, they found a little pony brought round to the Hall door, with Ben Dimble, one of the lads who helped in the stables, standing beside it.

"Master said as how Shetland Bobby was to be for young Missy's riding, and as how I was to tend her, and see as she didn't fall off; and teach her to keep on, and walk by her side till she knowed how to sit him of herself." Ben uttered this speech all in a breath, and with a grin of intense delight at being promoted to the office of Miss Kate's master of the horse.

For some time the pony occasioned a considerable relief to the tax upon Matty's strength; but after a while Kate found out that the rambles might be extended by the aid of Shetland Bobby's legs. She took a fancy to seeing new places, and to going farther and farther without noticing that these long walks caused nurse involuntarily to pant and loiter behind, unable to keep up with the pace of the pony and groom.

But happily, chance brought about a resource that not only produced an extra pleasure to Matty's young charge, but afforded herself an opportunity for rest which she would never else have liked to ask or take.

In one of the pony rides the party had gone beyond the park and precincts of Heathcote Hall, and had entered those of the adjoining estate, Worthington Court.

It was a fine old place—the finest in the county—but it was now untenanted; its present owner being abroad, living frugally, in order that he might repair the extravagances committed by his predecessor. The old mansion had a desolate air; the shutters closed, the terraces and gardens overgrown with weeds, not a living creature to be seen save a large house-dog and the old man and woman in charge.

The child seemed much struck and interested with the spot; and Matty, lifting her out of the saddle, bade Ben lead Shetland Bobby into the shade, while she took her young mistress into one of the cool rooms, to eat the lunch she had brought with them for her. While little Kate sat enjoying the fruit and bread, she asked all kinds of questions about the curious old house, and about the people who formerly lived in it, all of which her nurse seemed to be perfectly acquainted with.

"Yes, many and many's the time I've been here before, dar-

ling," said Matty, with a sigh, as she looked around the room in which they were. "This was old Madam Worthington's morning-parlour, as it was called; and here it was that she used to sit, when my own darling Miss Hetty came to visit her attended by me. The old 'Squire was mighty careful that his daughter should come over often to pay her respects to Madam Worthington; but I knew fast enough who it was that he was anxious she should see, and that should see her." And Matty nodded knowingly, speaking aloud, but as if to herself.

"And tell me about that curious black cabinet over there, Nurse! Do you know what's in it? I should like to peep! Lift me up!"

"It's locked, my darling!" answered Matty, after trying the door, in habitual compliance with an expressed wish of her charge's. "I knew it must be locked; it always used to be kept locked in the old times."

"And look at those odd pictures, worked with stitches! A dickey-bird, with a couple of cherries hanging from his crooked beak. And those letters all of a row, in different colours—very faint colours—with little trees, three-cornered trees, dotted about among them. And that basket of plums, with a drop of rain and a bee on one of them. And there's a painting of a fish, lying on some wet grass. And who is that little girl, over the chimney-piece, with a blue sash on, and red shoes?"

"That's a picture of Fermor Worthington, the daughter of young Mr. Morton Worthington, after he chose to marry, and bring home a wife like himself, stiff, and high, and haughty, and cold. He was always a grand, grave young gentleman—but he didn't always like grave young ladies; however, that's neither here nor there."

"But the little girl—what did you say her name was?—tell me more about her;" said Kate, her eyes still fixed upon the full-length portrait of a child no older than herself, which hung immediately opposite to where she was sitting.

"Fermor Worthington," repeated the nurse. "It's an odd name—especially for a little girl; but it was a family name, as

I've heard; and when Mr. Morton had a child born to him, he gave it to her. She was one of the sweetest children I ever came near. She was not exactly what you might call beautiful—though she had a heavenly sort of look in her face, too; but she had such a taking countenance, so good, so innocent; and such an angel's temper! I never saw her put out in my life, much less wrangle or cry. Pretty, gentle Miss Fermor! I wonder what's become of her! I suppose they took her abroad with 'em, and made a Frenchified young miss of her. And yet, it'd take a deal to Frenchify such a modest, sweet young thing as she was!"

After this first visit to Worthington Court, Kate frequently made her nurse bring her thither. She would trot all over the old deserted house; peer into the china closets; lift up the antiquated chair-covers; look behind the moth-eaten bed-hangings; start at the sudden reflection of herself in the tall, dim mirrors; pore over the pictures, clouded by mildewing neglect; and watch the shadows of the climbing plant trained against the library window, as they flickered and trembled upon the polished oaken floor. But what of all other things most riveted her attention, was the portrait of the little girl over the parlour chimney-piece. She used to sit, musingly, opposite to it, lost in thought, her gaze fixed upon the gentle countenance; but whenever her pre-occupation was noticed, she broke it off, and spoke of something else, lightly and almost jeeringly, as if ashamed of her own emotion. She would even use hard, disdainful words, depreciating the beauty of the face, and scoffing at the child's recorded goodness; declaring that, for her part, she didn't fancy she should have liked her at all, and wouldn't wish to have known her; abused her name as a prim one—a pattern one; and was quite glad she was gone away. While her heart was full of admiration, and loving interest, and softened feeling, her speech perversely affected indifference and distaste. She felt a sort of anger at the empire the picture had over her—a resentment at the effect its soft beauty, and the tale of the child's virtue, had upon her own feelings; but, in her inmost self, she involuntarily yielded up her spirit to the gentle ascendancy they exercised over her fancy.

While little Kate sat thus, her eyes fastened upon the picture, Matty would murmur on, half to herself, half recounting to her young companion, her by-gone remembrances and associations with the old place. She would speak of old Madam Worthington, sitting so starched and so upright in her arm-chair, near the fire; of young Mr. Morton, how stately and how stern he was, yet changing colour when Miss Hetty came in; of her sprightly answers; of his lofty speeches and proud looks, while his voice trembled and his lip quivered, in spite of himself, when his eye encountered hers; of how, for all his gravity and dignity, a word from the young girl would move him past concealment; and how, after all, she would show that she neither saw nor cared what was passing in his mind. She was but a young thing then—a hoyden—a light-hearted, romping girl,” muttered Matty; “what was she to care for his grandsire looks, I trow? She made believe she didn’t see ’em; or else made game of ’em!”

And then Kate would give a short, triumphant laugh, as if, child as she was, she understood and enjoyed her mother’s treatment of the august marble man.

“He was an excellent young gentleman, to be sure; very good, and righteous, and strict in all that was fit to do,” continued the nurse. “Every body said he had the best of principles—he prided himself on his principle—he used to tell my Miss Hetty, he did everything on principle; (and then she, naughty thing! used to giggle; though I can’t wonder at it, neither, she so young and all!) and so he did; for he stuck to his principles of doing what he ought, instead of what he liked, when the old gentleman died, and it was found out that he had spent more money than he should. Well, what did Mr. Morton do, but break up the establishment; and, that he might save enough to pay off his father’s debts, left the old place he was so fond of, and went away to stint and scrimp in foreign parts. Yes, he was a principled man, if you please! Pity he had such a stony way with him!”

“Was Fermor a principled girl?” asked little Kate.

“Well—yes; I suppose she was,” answered Matty, with a hesitating, considering air. “That is, she was always good and pretty-behaved.”

"Had she a stony way with her?" said Kate.

"Oh, dear, no! When she was doing just what she was bid, she always looked pleasant and cheerful, as if she liked best to do it."

"Had she a silly way?" was the next question.

"Silly! Oh, la, no! The sensiblest little dear you ever came near; and such a one at her book! Why, she knew all her A B C right down to Z and-pussy-and, straight on, or dodging about, before she was two year old!"

Kate swung the two little legs that dangled from the old-fashioned couch on which she sat, with considerable energy, for a long time in silence, as she continued to gaze up at the picture of her of whom they were speaking. At length she said: "Nurse, I should like you to teach me my letters when we go home."

"That I will, my darling! and then you'll be clever, like sweet, pretty, gentle Miss Fermor," added the nurse.

"I don't want to be like pretty Miss Fermor!" exclaimed Kate. "I dare say she was a stupid little frump. She looks as prim and as sleek as our old Minny, when her kitten's having a game of play, and she pretends not to want to join in it. See how she sits upon that bank, just as if she was afraid of soiling that white frock, lest she should be chid for it."

"I think it's a pretty picture; and it's so like—oh, so like the sweet child herself!" said Matty. "I could just fancy I see her, with her mild blue eyes, the very colour of her sash, only with such a beautiful look in them; pure and clear, like the sky of Heaven."

The little socks and shoes swung to and fro as before, while Kate said, in a softened voice: "Very like her, do you say?"

"Very." And the nurse looked silently at it for some time, as did her young companion. But presently Matty added: "She was, indeed, a dear, pretty creature! not so pretty as my own darling, to be sure; but I couldn't wish my own darling to be a better or a sweeter child than she was—and I'm certain she'll always try and be as nice behaved."

"What, I?" said Kate. "I won't try and be any such thing,

It must be absurd to be always as well-behaved as she was! She has such a good-child look! Come, let's go home. Where's Shetland Bobby?"

CHAPTER V.

THE 'Squire had an aunt, a sister of his father, who came to pay him a visit of some length. It was a periodical custom from time immemorial, and, of course, in the old 'Squire's time, had always taken place at the same season of the year, and had endured a precisely similar length, commencing on one particular date, and terminating on another; and the observance prevailed still.

Mrs. Mustley was a lady of assured presence and assertive speech. Her sentences generally contained some impressive suggestion or counsel; prefaced, it is true, with a certain deprecatory formula, but which was uttered in a tone calculated rather to enforce attention to the subsequent advice than to palliate its oracular effect. Although she might introduce her decree with a flourish of conventional deference, it could yet be no otherwise received than as a decree. Her hearers felt bound to accept as an inevitable ordination what she pronounced with so solemn and final an air. There was only one exception to those with whom Mrs. Mustley's edicts were law; this exception was Mrs. Mustley's husband—for she had a husband, although his individual existence seemed merged in her more important person—who had a quiet way with him of listening, as if acquiescent, but acting in total opposition to her fiat. He was a little, placid, shy, absent man, generally taking a seat in some corner of the room, and rarely speaking unless spoken to. He generally read at meals, and was buried in a book at most times. He always dressed in black and wore powder.

"Nephew," said Mrs. Mustley to the 'Squire, as they sat at breakfast, the second morning after her arrival, "you'll excuse me, but really you should observe more circumspection in your

mode of treating that little girl you have adopted—Kate, I think you call her.”

“Yes; Hetty’s child,” said the ‘Squire

“Well, far be it from me to dictate, but I must say, it is high time you thought of some better tuition for her than she has at present. That good woman—Martha, I think you call her—is all very well; trustworthy, probably, and attached, and so forth; but an ignorant person of that class is no fit instructress for youth.”

“It is early days with Kate yet; she’s a mere baby still,” pleaded the ‘Squire.

“Permit me to observe, nephew, that it is never too early for the inculcation of ideas, and the instilling of moral tenets; there is no knowing how soon vulgar notions may be acquired, vulgar sayings adopted, or vulgar habits contracted. I would not be thought to interfere, still less to prescribe; nevertheless, you absolutely ought to take into consideration the necessity for providing a proper person to superintend that child’s education.”

“I will think of it, aunt,” said the ‘Squire, with a resigned sigh; “I have never considered little Kate but as my pet, my plaything, my pretty prattler—too very a child to be taught anything.”

“Forgive me, if I make the remark, nephew, that that is a very short-sighted view of the case; very short-sighted, very weak, and very wrong. That child is not always to remain a mere plaything—it will become a woman, if it live. By the bye, allow me to say, Mr. Mustley, that you take too much butter; you will be ill, if you venture to eat so much.”

“Yes, my dear,” replied Mr. Mustley, proceeding to spread upon his dry toast the broad slab of butter he had just helped himself to.

“But to resume,” said Mrs. Mustley. “That child will not be always a child; you cannot gainsay that fact, nephew, however unwilling I may be to press my argument farther than may be agreeable. The child will grow up, and then how is it to perform its part in the world, as a reasonable, as a well-informed being, if it have always been left to herd with servants and low-bred people?”

She paused, as if for a reply to her question ; but feeling it to be unanswerable, and judging from her nephew's silence, who only broke the crown of his egg with a smart tap of the spoon, that he felt it to be so too, she went on. " You will believe that nothing is farther from my wish than to be officious, nephew, when I suggest that something should positively be resolved upon, and that at once, with regard to commencing a proper course of study for this child. I will myself take her in hand, while I remain here, and see what can be done. I will question her upon what she already knows, and discover what will be best for her to prosecute in future."

" I am afraid you will find she knows little or nothing as yet, my dear aunt," said the 'Squire. " Your intention is doubtless very kind, but I doubt whether——"

" Say no more, nephew ; leave all to me : a little difficulty shall not discourage me," said Mrs. Mustley, conclusively. Then, addressing her husband, she said : " Far be it from me to dictate, Mr. Mustley, but——"

" Certainly, my dear," assented he.

" But you really should not miss this fine morning for a walk. The book can keep cool till you come back ; and the park looks quite tempting this bright, sunny day."

" Yes, my dear," replied he, drawing an easy-chair near to the window, ensconcing himself within, adjusting his spectacles, leisurely crossing his legs, and proceeding to open his volume at the page where he last left off."

" And I will go seek my young neophyte," said Mrs. Mustley, sweeping away with the air of general complacency and stateliness, with which she usually covered any point-blank discrepancy of the like kind between her husband's words and his deeds, consequent upon one of her proposals.

It was never exactly known what passed at these interviews between Mrs. Mustley and little Kate ; but they took place daily, and, after them, the child's eyes were red, and her cheeks flushed, and she looked indignant, and swelling with a sense of past struggle. She was of too high a spirit to complain ; besides, she felt

That she had borne her full share in the word-contest which had evidently taken place between her and her new monitress, so that there was something of triumph; as well as of indignation, in her heightened color.

The 'Squire was perplexed; he was of too passive a temper to adopt the active measure of prohibiting his formidable aunt from lecturing Kate; he had a vague idea that children required discipline, and believed that a woman of Mrs. Mustley's experience must know how to exercise it; he, therefore, thought the best way he could do to neutralize the effect of the disagreeable process, was to increase his own indulgence towards the child during this necessary ordeal, and to make her feel as happy as she could the rest of the day, in order to console her for that hour of indispensable endurance. But that which chiefly swayed him to permit the arrangement to go on for the present unchecked, was the knowledge that it would not be of very long continuance.

"What a blowzed condition you are in, child!" exclaimed Mrs. Mustley, as Kate came running in, one morning, to tell her uncle, with great glee, that she had spied a blackbird's nest in the old thorn-tree on the lawn, low enough for her, when Matty lifted her up, to peep in and see three young ones huddling together in the nest, to keep each other warm.

"Take me on your knee while I tell you all about it," said she to her uncle.

He raised her to her favourite seat, while she continued eagerly to relate the wonders of the half-fledged family,—the old birds feeding them,—the gasping beaks,—the panting sides,—the huge-looking eyes, protruding from the scanty down sprinkled on their bare skulls and skinny backs.

"Did you hear me speak to you, child?" resounded from the portentous voice of Mrs. Mustley; "I remarked what a blowzed condition you were in."

"Yes, I heard you," said little Kate, looking over her shoulder for an instant with a nod, and then turning her head round again to resume her eager talk.

"Then why don't you attend to me if you heard me?" persisted Mrs. Mustley.

"Because I'm busy telling uncle about the nest," replied Kate.

"But I am accustomed to be attended to when I speak," observed Mrs. Mustley, loftily.

"Are you?" said Kate.

"Yes; and I desire that you will attend to me, Miss Pert."

"Well, what do you want to say?" said Kate.

"I observed that you were in a shameful condition for a young lady,—all blowzy, and dirty, and heated; see what a state your frock is in,—rumpled and splashed with mud! And there's a pair of hands! as though you had been digging potatoes! Why, where have you been, to muck and muddle yourself this fashion?"

"I've been feeding the ducks, and watching the hen with the ducklings. Oh, uncle! old Specklebreast was in such a taking, when she saw her little yellow children plunge into the water and swim across the pond! She ran about on the bank like a mad thing, and I after her, trying to make her understand that her children were in no danger."

"And a pretty pickle you have made of yourself, scrambling about the muddy bank, and paddling in and out the pond! There's a pair of shoes to rub against your uncle's legs!"

"I don't mind the mud, thank you, aunt," said the 'Squire, quietly drawing the grimy little socks and shoes away from the vicinity of his well-cleaned boot, and placing them upon the snow-white corded covering of his knee. "No matter for a little mud, bless her!" he added, hugging Kate closer against him.

"You'll excuse me, nephew, but you'll live to repent spoiling that child as you do. You make an absolute fool of her."

"No, he only makes much of me—don't you, uncle?" said she, putting up her mouth to be kissed.

"That I do, my Kate. And I can hardly make too much of thee, for my own liking," he said, fondly.

"But for your own comfort, for your own peace hereafter

You'll acquit me of any wish to be pointed, if I say that you not only make a fool of her, but of yourself, nephew, to pet the child in that absurd way."

"I'll risk my own comfort; I'm very comfortable petting Kate," said the 'Squire, with a smile.

"We're both very comfortable, thank you, ma'am, petting each other," said the child, caressingly stroking her uncle's cheek, and reflecting his smile, with a saucy one of her own.

"You encourage her to be impertinent, nephew, by your ridiculous over-indulgence. You'll make her an odious child, and a detestable woman. You'll make her loathed by every one that comes near her."

"On the contrary, uncle has always indulged me, and every body loves me, except you," said Kate.

"If I don't love you, child, I would do you a benefit," returned Mrs. Mustley; "I would save you from becoming that hateful thing, a spoiled brat. You know not your true friend."

"Yes I do," answered Kate, nestling nearer to the 'Squire. "Uncle never does any thing else but try and make me happy; you never do any thing else but try to torment me."

"I torment you—as you call it—for your good, you poor little ignorant child, you!" said Mrs. Mustley. "If I take the pains to reclaim you from your state of moral darkness, it is because I think it my duty not to omit stretching forth a helping hand to one who so sorely needs enlightened aid. You have no mother to direct what should be done, and it behoves me, as a woman, to have pity for your unfortunate condition, and point out what I deem essential for its rectifying."

"My aunt means you very kindly, Katey; we must be thankful and grateful, not pert and saucy, must we?" said the 'Squire. "Turn to Mrs. Mustley, and tell her so in your own pretty way, and say, 'Thank you, ma'am.'"

"Thank you ma'am, for meaning kindly," said Kate; "but if you mean to be kind, why can't you seem kind?"

Mrs. Mustley did not immediately answer; but presently she said, "Come, it's your lesson time; let's go upstairs, child, and

commence the morning's studies." Seeing that Kate hesitated she reiterated, "Come, child, come; I'm waiting."

"Do you wish me to go with her?" said Kate to her uncle.

"Of course he does—of course my nephew wishes you not to keep me waiting. Come!"

Kate lingered yet another instant; but finding that the 'Squire relaxed his hold of her a little, in mechanical obedience to his aunt's words, the child slid down from his arms, and walked resolutely out of the room with Mrs. Mustley. The 'Squire, as he generally did, when this juncture arrived, walked, with his quiet sigh of resignation, to the window; and stood there, drumming idly with his fingers upon the pane.

"My good nephew,"—began a shy, hesitating voice, from the corner near him.

The 'Squire, in his reverie, had not perceived the small retiring figure of Mr. Mustley ensconced in an arm-chair just within the recess of the deep embayed window where he was standing.

"My excellent nephew," went on the voice, after a bashful cough and pause, "I wish I could be of any assistance to you in your perplexity. Education has been a difficult problem from the very beginning of the world, and has occupied the hearts and heads of the tenderest and the wisest. Don't be downcast, because you cannot at once hit upon the best plan for your little missy's training."

"If I should be the means of rendering her an odious child, —a detestable woman, after all! I, who would have her loved by all the world as I love her!" said the 'Squire, thoughtfully and mournfully.

"She will not become odious or detestable, take my word for it," said Mr. Mustley. "There is the making of a very fine creature in that young thing, or I'm much mistaken. I should like nothing better than to have the forming of her mind. What a Greek scholar I'd make her!"

"No, no," said the 'Squire; "a little music, a little drawing, —perhaps some knowledge of dancing,—would be quite as much

as the poor child need try to manage. I suppose she must learn something ; but by and bye, and by degrees, by degrees."

"I have some smattering of the two first accomplishments you name," said Mr. Mustley, hesitatingly ; "I know something of the rudiments of drawing and perspective, and have made the theory of music my occasional study ; if you would let me try my skill in imparting some little portion of what I have acquired in these arts to your young niece, I should be both proud and pleased to have her for my pupil during the remainder of our stay."

The 'Squire grasped the shy-spoken little old man by his shrinking, retiring hand, in hearty thanks ; and then he added, "Do you think I spoil Kate ?"

Mr. Mustley only gave his bashful cough, pushed his spectacles nervously upon his bald, powdery forehead, and brushed the snuff from his shirt-frill.

"If you do, I can't help it ; I can't help indulging that child. She's the very apple of my eye, the delight of my heart, and I can't help showing it. Upon my life, I can't help it."

"It certainly is impossible to help loving her, and I don't know why it need be helped. She's a most fascinating little creature, with those dark eyes of hers, and that white, ample forehead. I've no doubt she has a fine memory. What a head she'd have for Greek roots !"

But seeing the same frightened expression cross the 'Squire's face as before, upon the same hint, Mr. Mustley added, "Don't be afraid ; I promise to teach her nothing but music and drawing, till you give me leave."

"But, perhaps—all things considered—even those might be too much for her to begin now, in addition to her lessons from my aunt," stammered the 'Squire.

"Never fear ; my tutelage shall supersede that of Mrs. Mustley," said the placid-spoken little old man.

"But will she—may not she—do you think she will give up her pupil ?" gasped the 'Squire, with an impressive recollection of his aunt's mode of carrying a point upon which she had resolved.

"Leave all that to me, leave all that to me," replied Mr. Mustley, as he quietly prepared to re-inter himself in the pages of his book.

Next day, when Mrs. Mustley was about to stalk off with Kate, announcing that it was lesson-time, her husband rose from his seat, took the child's hand in his to lead her away, and said, "Just so, my dear. Kate takes her lessons with me to-day."

"With you, Mr. Mustley? Why, you must be dreaming! you can teach her nothing but a parcel of humdrum old trash; philosophy and science, and musty, bygone things, that could be of no use to a modern young lady, or any young lady."

"Exactly, my dear;" and he moved to the door.

"If you want us, you'll find Kate and me in the library, my good nephew," he added, as he quietly turned the handle of the lock.

"Reluctant as I may be to withdraw my guidance where I see it so needful," said Mrs. Mustley, drawing herself up to her full height, "I must positively and at once declare that I renounce all future interference in that child's welfare."

"Quite right, my dear," said Mr. Mustley, as he passed out, hand-in-hand with little Kate.

CHAPTER VI.

THE change from her late instructress to her present bland old preceptor, was a salutary as well as delightful relief to the child. The one lesson-time had been a constant series of bickering and wrangling; stern commands on the part of Mrs. Mustley, flippant replies on that of Kate. Nothing could be more pernicious for a child of Kate Ireton's disposition than this ceaseless word-war; it excited all her worst qualities, strengthening her tendency to wilfulness, and fostering her spirit of imperiousness. She gained

confidence in her power of disputation, and learned to use her tongue in retort, with self-applause and self-reliance. The other lesson-time resolved itself into a perpetual, patient listening. She had nothing else for it, while the serene little old pedant went complacently on, pouring forth his streams of erudition into her childish ear.

He commenced his instructions in perspective, by laying before her a sheet of drawing-paper, marking certain spots on it, drawing various straight lines, transverse lines, parallel lines, horizontal lines, diagonal lines, and intersecting lines; and then going tracing about, just above them, with the hovering tip of his pencil, and discoursing learnedly on of "point of distance," "directing point," "vanishing point," "vanishing line," "ground line," and "horizon."

It was his rule that there was nothing like beginning at the beginning; therefore he opened his elementary precepts in music by a dissertation on the systems of the ancients. He told her of the different principles laid down by Pythagoras and Aristoxenus; and then he would branch off into a discussion of in-composite ditones, semiditones, hemitones, and trihemitones. He would dilate with enthusiasm upon the "sonus bombus;" and told her that "A B being the supertertius of G B, G B will sound a diatessaron to A B towards the acumen; and since A B is Proslambanomenos, G B will indisputably be Hypaton Diatonos."

Whereupon little Kate would say, "Oh!" as if she took his word for it.

And then he would say, she doubtless perceived that "as A B was quadruple of C B, C B must necessarily be Nete Hyperboleon."

To which she replied, "Is it?" and he rejoined, "Of course."

His tone was so placid, his manner so composedly emphatic, and so satisfiedly conclusive of her comprehending all he uttered, that there seemed no occasion for her to declare her inapprehensiveness; all she had to do was to sit and listen, which she did.

her thoughts busying themselves with his pleasant, even voice, that went smoothly on, taking all for granted; with his dappled cheeks, on which meandered a thousand minute, veiny, red lines; with his large, bald head, his spectacles thrust back upon it, (wondering whether they would keep their place, and often watching their gradual slipping down, and when they ultimately ended by dropping over his nose, saw him mildly push them up again and resume); with his black coat, powder-speckled in front, straying particles of the white plastered mass that decorated its collar behind, at the nape of his neck; with the layers of snuff that loaded the ridges of his cambric shirt-frill and kerseymere waistcoat; with the white, but wrinkled hands, and their shiny, loose skin, hanging so separate, yet so a part of them, that it often excited in her a whimsical wish to try how far she could draw it up away from the thin fingers beneath, like a natural clinging glove.

Little Kate had plenty to entertain her fancy with, while the bland old book-worm prosed on.

"Euclid doubles the numbers made use of by Quintilianus; but you will at once perceive, my dear, that whether we take the number 30 or 60 for the gross content of the tetrachord, the matter is just the same."

"Just, sir—to me," was the reply that rose to Kate's lips, with a roguish twinkle of her eye, which, however, was completely lost upon the old gentleman, wrapped as he was in abstract speculation.

He had not the most distant perception that all his learned teaching was so much time lost—so many words thrown away. He had not an idea that to address the understanding of a child of her age in the style he did, was sheer absurdity. He could perceive the defects in the system of moral training pursued with regard to her, but saw not the blunders he made in his attempt at her intellectual culture. He could discern the strictness of his wife, and the spoiling of the 'Squire, and could comprehend how injudicious they each were; but he never dreamed that his own method of instruction was, in its way, equally ill-adapted to

produce any beneficial effect. But he was a kind-mannered, gentle old man ; and the child liked him, and her lesson-time with him, extremely.

It was, therefore, with regret that she heard the time appointed for Mr. and Mrs. Mustley's taking their leave. Since the old lady announced her determination of taking no farther part in Kate's concerns, she had adhered to her welcome threat, and had left the little girl wholly in the hands of her husband and nephew, to be ruined after their several tastes. Once only she had nearly forgotten herself, and offered another piece of advice. They happened to be talking of some mutual acquaintances of theirs—distant connections, indeed ; and Mrs. Mustley wound up an eulogium on her esteemed friends, the Whites, of Eggham Park, by saying to the 'Squire: "You'll exonerate me from any charge of wishing to sway your proceedings, nephew, if I just venture to suggest, that the Whites, of Eggham Park, were much respected by your poor dear mother, as well as myself ; and therefore it might not be amiss—nay, I may go so far as to affirm that it would be only proper—were you to send them an invitation to Heathcote Hall next Easter. Their daughter, Alicia, is grown such a dear, excellent girl—so prudent, so good, so everything that a young lady should be. She would make an admirable companion for your Kate ; her society and example would be an inestimable advantage. But, excuse me, I said I never would make another remark relative to that child's management."

"Yes, my dear," said Mr. Mustley.

"I will think of what you say, aunt," said the 'Squire. "I did not know that they were especial favourites with my mother ; but their being friends of yours will ensure their welcome here at any time. I will invite them."

But when Mr. and Mrs. Mustley were gone, the time went so pleasantly with the 'Squire—relieved from the incubus of his aunt's dictation, and restored to the uninterrupted society of his hunting associates—that he forgot all about his promised invitation to the Whites of Eggham Park. Whether it was this fail-

ure in his observance of a point on which her wishes had been distinctly expressed, or whether it was owing to the want of due appreciation and ill success with which her efforts on Kate's behalf had been followed, certain it is, that her nephew received indubitable proof of his aunt's having taken deep offence. Not long after Mr. and Mrs. Mustley left Heathcote Hall, the worthy quietist died; and in answer to the letter which the 'Squire wrote to his aunt, offering his condolences, and begging her to come and make his house her home in her time of sorrow, a most distant reply arrived, informing him that she was much obliged, but that she intended to spend her period of mourning with her esteemed and worthy friends, the Whites, of Eggham Park.

The 'Squire, sorry that she was affronted, but certainly far from sorry that she declined making her abode with him, gave himself up to a peaceful enjoyment of his present existence. Kate had grown of a companionable age; and, habituated to pony-back from babyhood, the little girl was early a fearless rider, and a skilful horsewoman. She now accompanied her uncle in all his out-door pursuits, and was constantly by his side, abroad and at home. He was not happy if she were out of his sight; and she loved him as devotedly as he her. He was the only being whom she implicitly obeyed, and had not a thought of contradicting. With all others, she was apt to be froward, impetuous, ungovernable; fond of having her own way, and accustomed to obtain it. But to him she invariably yielded. His will was her law; to see him pleased, her chiefest pleasure.

While Kate was still very young, an old friend and school-fellow of her uncle's came to enjoy a short-lived holiday with him—the first which the incessant demands upon his time had permitted him to snatch from the midst of his London avocations since he had commenced his profession.

His name was John Weldon, a lawyer of great repute for shrewd-headed, worldly knowledge; he was possessed of sound, natural good sense, and had spared no pains in adding information and acquirements to original advantages. He was an odd combination of quickness and slowness in manner. He would, at

times, dart out a sarcasm, or a retort, with an almost startling suddenness; at others he would seem absorbed, inapprehensive, unnoting; but some pertinent observation, some abrupt comment, would prove that he had only been quietly and patiently watching, while apparently so inattentive to what was passing. He would pause, in silence, and looking down, so long and so absently, that he had the air of one wholly lost to the consciousness of surrounding circumstances; but a sudden raising of the head, a rapid nod, and a sharp "Go on!" would demonstrate that he was fully alive to all the points of procedure.

When he arrived at the old Hall, he seemed determined to give himself up to a thorough and lazy enjoyment of the country holiday he had allowed himself with his friend the 'Squire. He luxuriated in the absolute repose, the mere "sitting still and doing nothing," so rarely tasted by the professional Londoner. He would throw himself upon the cushioned seat at one of the open windows, and content himself with gazing out at the trees and turf glades of the park, and with snuffing up the fresh pure air, not once caring to go forth and walk or ride. The 'Squire used, each morning, to try his best to induce him to come out and see the new lodge he was building, or the new road he was laying out, or the new plantation he was meditating; but the lawyer was not to be tempted from his shady lounge, where, he said, he had full command of earth and sky; and what could he have better or more?

"Nay, I want you to look at the new fish-preserve I am planning, down in the hollow; you can't see it from the windows," said the 'Squire.

"And so add water to my elements of enjoyment?" returned the lawyer. "But I'll none of it. It forms no constituent part of my pleasures. Neither in my scenery, nor in my potations, do I need the impertinent mingling of water. It hath an allaying, not a heightening quality."

"Let me order out the horses, and we'll have a gallop over to Oakleigh Hill. From there, I'll show you a fine expanse of country that you wo'n't beat in all the panoramas that ever were exum-

bited in your great city. You gain a view over five counties from the top of Oakleigh Hill."

"My dear fellow, my desires are more limited; a home-view best contents me. Why should I race ten miles and back, through dust and heat, to look at a prospect that won't pleasure me half as well as yonder grassy knoll, crowned with wooded beauty, that lies stretched before me, giving me no farther pains than to lie stretched here looking at it?"

The 'Squire laughed, and said: "As you please; of course, I only fear lest you should find the old place dull, and I want to keep you here as long as I can."

"And, depend on it, I stay here as long as I can," returned his friend. "No fear of my finding any place dull, after sitting day after day, all day, in court."

"Is court dull? I always thought court was the gayest place in the world," said little Kate. "I've heard of the king and queen sitting on their thrones, with all the courtiers in court-dresses, and ladies in court-trains, fine as fine could be!"

"In court, and at court, are very different things; though I have heard the last pronounced to be little less dull than the first, by those who think that walking through a succession of state-rooms is not very lively entertainment. But, be that as it may, little one, you are talking of going to court, as it is called, and I was talking of attending court—a court of law."

"Ah, a court of law! And you are a lawyer. Is that the reason you are a bad horseman?" said she.

"It never struck me before, but, perhaps it may," he answered drily; "I profess to deal in equity, not in equitation. But how did you find out I was a bad horseman, little one?"

"I guessed it, because you never will ride," answered she. "I should think no one dislikes riding, but those who can't manage a horse."

The lawyer laughed. "Then you can manage a horse, I conclude. And you are fond of riding?"

"Yes; and I am sorry you are not, as, while you are here alone and I lose our pleasant rides together."

"Frankly answered," returned the lawyer, smiling; "I wish we could get witnesses to speak as straight-forwardly, and as much to the point."

"Then you'll go? You'll ride out with us next time?" said Kate, eagerly.

"I made no such promise, that I recollect," said the lawyer, amused with her pertinacity.

"No, you didn't promise, but you looked as if you were going to consent," replied she.

"Oh, ho! You judge by looks, do you, my little maid? If you were a lawyer, you would learn to place little faith in looks. And yet, methinks, I can read something of the truth in yours. Let me see; there's a saucy brightness in that pair of eyes that tells me they can flash with the triumph of getting the better, in word or deed; there's a lurking smile in that dimple, which bespeaks a roguish delight in mischief; there's something in the curve of those full, red lips, that shows a resolute will."

"If you don't judge by looks, why do you stare at my face so?" she said.

"Well done, petulance!" exclaimed he. "But, come, I have said nothing of your looks that they need be ashamed of. If there's a love of getting the better, there's also a likelihood of choosing the better, and having the better; for there's both right heart and right mind in those eyes; if there's a bit of the rogue in the smiling dimple, there's a sweet beauty to atone for the roguishness; and if there's will in the lips, will is that which may be turned to highest good as to deepest evil."

"But I don't choose my looks and my face to be talked about," said Kate.

"Ah, ha! the haughtiness of a beauty who is scarcely ten years old! Why, child, if your face fulfil its present promise, it is like enough to be talked about, and fought about, by and bye!"

Kate, in high displeasure at the lawyer's banter, turned away, and addressed herself exclusively to her uncle, who bade her go out on her habit, and ride over as far as the next village, upon some commission which he pretended wanted executing, knowing

that she cared not to ride out without him, unless for some express purpose of his.

After dinner, as the gentlemen were sitting together over their wine, the lawyer said: "You're very fond of that dark-eyed child, aren't you?"

"I love her better than anything in the world—better than the world itself," was the 'Squire's answer.

"Humph! I thought as much," said his friend.

After a few minutes' silence, during which the 'Squire had looked thoughtfully, but happily, into space, revolving in how many ways Kate was dear to him, the lawyer added abruptly: "Did you ever make your will?"

"Eh? No, never," said the 'Squire, in answer to his friend's question, as if awaking from a reverie. "No; I like life so well, I never thought of making preparations for death."

"The way with many people who prize life—think they're never to part with it!" said the lawyer. "Nevertheless, a time comes when they're forced to give it up, regret it how they may. So best put affairs in such order as not to be taken by surprise when called upon to quit them. You should make your will."

"It's too much trouble," said the 'Squire, laughing, "You know I hate trouble—business trouble."

"And so leave all the trouble to those who come after you; business trouble for those who have to arrange your affairs, money trouble—or rather, want of money trouble, for those who ought to inherit. It is every man's duty to take upon himself the little present trouble of making a will, in order that he may spare to his survivors the great after trouble of finding no will."

"Well, well, I'll see about it," said the 'Squire. "I mean to live on many a long year yet. Time enough!—time enough! There's long life in the family! A good, sound constitution of my own! comfortable prospect, eh?"

"Did you ever insure your life?" inquired the lawyer, drily and suddenly.

"Eh? No. Wish I could, though, eh?" returned he, laughing, "since I tell you I've every reason to love it. I lead it in

the way I love best; I have my horses and dogs, my comfortable house, my snug room, my fine old trees, my bottle of wine, good hearty friends, Jack Weldon for my friend of friends; nobody to say me nay in aught I have a mind to say or do; out all day long, if I think fit; up all night, if I please; jolly fellows for companions; faithful servants to take care of me; and, to crown all, my darling little Kate, whom I love as if she were my own—as, indeed, she is, every inch of her—my own flesh and blood; my niece—dear to me as a daughter!”

“For her sake you should insure your life,” said the lawyer. “For her sake you should make your will. If I remember rightly, you have only a life-interest here; the estate, in default of direct issue, going to some distant claimant—over in Canada, or Lord knows where! On all accounts, it would be advisable to make a will. It would secure personals; and, moreover, the very act of making testamentary arrangements would bring you to look into your affairs a little, which would be very advisable.”

“And very worrying,” said the 'Squire, shifting uneasily in his chair, and then letting himself drop gently back into it.

“You live in an expensive style, for all its seeming simplicity,” pursued his friend; “you keep up the old place as it has ever been; you maintain your pack and your stud; you keep much land unprofitably fallow; you don't look into your receipts to ascertain whether they keep pace with your outlay. A man's a blockhead who, under such circumstances, don't make his will and insure his life—that is, if he have any one he cares about, to come after him.”

“But, after all, insuring my life won't make me live one hour the longer or the surer, and you know it,” said the 'Squire, with a playfully conclusive air; “lawyer though you be, you won't attempt to prove that, I suppose; and as long as I do live, Kate has a home with me.”

“And when you die?” sharply retorted the lawyer. “You don't seem to me to comprehend the plainest form of question.”

“Yet you put it tolerably plainly, too, Jack,” said the Squire, with his look of quiet humour. “Come,” continued he,

"Don't let's talk, or think, of unpleasant things, but take another glass of this bright old Burgundy, worth all the dull wills, and insurances, and musty parchment deeds, that ever were devised by you lawyers to torment mankind with."

They fell into other talk, and no more was said on the same subject between the 'Squire and his friend, until the last evening before the lawyer left. Just as they were parting for the night, the 'Squire was recounting some circumstance relative to his late father, when it struck him that his companion was lost in thought, and not attending to what he was saying; but, upon his making some remark to this effect, the lawyer replied briskly: "I beg your pardon; I perfectly follow what you say;" and he repeated his precise last words. After the space of a minute, however, he said: "You will remember what I said of the prudence of insuring your life?"

"I'll remember," said the 'Squire.

"And you'll think of what I told you about making your will?"

"I'll be sure to think of it," said the 'Squire.

"Don't fail, there's a good fellow!" said the lawyer.

"I won't," said the 'Squire, as he grasped his friend heartily and affectionately by the hand.



CHAPTER VII.

AND thus was Kate Ireton. Naturally spirited, quick, and intelligent; but in all acquirement, utterly deficient. She was never taught, never checked; but let to run wild as a little colt. Her comings and goings were as free as those of a bird; it was only her native tendency towards all that was refined and in good taste, which prevented her becoming coarse. She was unpolished, but she was graceful; she was unconventional, but she was not awkward. There was nothing rustic or rough about her, though she was perfectly easy and unconstrained. No one could have

mistaken her for anything but a little lady, by birth and habit. She had delicate features, a blooming complexion, a shape remarkable for its beautiful proportions, and a carriage instinct with simple natural dignity. She possessed perfect command of limb, owing to the free out-of-door life of exercise and open air which she had always led, and to the single accomplishment she possessed, that of sitting a horse well—the only thing she had ever learned to do. Her frame, as her disposition, was self-reliant; and the untutored mode of her bringing up had tended to foster, rather than to abate, this original bent. Absence of cultivation had not weakened her natural powers, it only threw them upon their own strength to develope for themselves their resources. She was never at a loss for a prompt action or a ready answer. Moreover, from her having lived exclusively among grown people, Kate's mode of expressing herself was not only expertly forward, but forward for her age. Her phraseology often had a turn not usual at her years.

One fine afternoon in latter summer she had found her way down to a favourite seat of hers. It was a stile, leading from some corn-fields of her uncle's, to a shady lane that skirted them, and wound away towards one of the park-lodges. Upon this stile she would sit, watching the minnows as they darted like smallest shadows of fish, in and out the weedy shallows of the brook, which ran beneath the thick, green hedge. Sometimes she would see the sleek body of a water-rat dive noiselessly, its track marked only by the air bubbles that rose from among the soft mud and ooze of the bank. Above her head hung bowery nut-trees, with ripening clusters coyly peeping from among the leaves. She was reaching up for the one that seemed nearest; kneeling on the topmost rail of the stile, trying to balance herself, and vainly leaning over into the hedge, endeavouring to pull towards her one bough after another until she should drag down the one on which grew the tempting bunch, when she heard a voice near her say, "You'll never manage it that way!"

She looked hastily round, and saw a young boy, a few years older than herself, seated on pony back, in the lane, watching her.

He wore an ample, tasselled cap, that shaded the very handsome eyes which looked up at her; his dress was a dark riding suit, of rather unusual fashion, upon which fell a broad lace collar, displaying the throat, and contrasting with the thick locks of chestnut hair which appeared beneath the cap. His whole appearance bespoke rank, and a certain natural, manly dignity, notwithstanding the youthful style of his apparel.

After the first surprise of seeing a stranger there, and when she had looked for some moments earnestly at him, Kate replied, "I'm determined not to be baffled, I shall try till I succeed."

She renewed her efforts, but with as little effect as before; the nuts were beyond her reach. The boy sat still, watching her; and Kate, as she caught a glimpse of his composed figure, and of the expression which she fancied she detected on his face, felt provoked at the smiling superiority with which he seemed to remain there.

"I'll hook it down for you with my riding whip," he said, as he moved his pony forward till it stood close beside her.

"Let it alone!" she exclaimed; "I'm determined to get it for myself."

"You're right to persevere," he answered. "Here, let me help you. Stand quite upright; step on to the top of the stile; give me your hand, I'll hold you steady while you reach up for it."

"How you order!" she said. "Do this, and do that; step up there, and give me your hand here. What right have you to dictate to me so?"

"Dictate! I suggest, for your own good."

"Ah! that's what you dictating people always call it,—advising or suggesting for our good. Still, I want the cluster of nuts, and I'll do as you propose. Not that I care for them, for we have finer in the orchard—filberts; but I don't choose to be disappointed when once I've set my heart on obtaining a thing."

"Best not set your heart, then, on anything too difficult to

obtain, and then you'll run no chance of disappointment," returned he.

" 'Best not,' 'best not!' It may be wiser, perhaps—but not best. The best is to succeed; and the more difficult the better the success," she replied.

"In a thing worth trying for—yes," said the boy. "Mere getting your own way for getting your way's sake, is little; but to conquer in a right matter is worth any amount of striving."

"What a preacher you are!" she exclaimed. "Who are you?"

"No matter, just now. Do you wish to get the nuts? That's the first thing to consider. We can talk about who I am afterwards," he said, with that quiet smile of his which irritated her by its composure—a composure looking so like gravity, that she felt as if she could not tell whether he were really smiling or not.

"More of your ordering and dictating!" she said. "You settle what's to be done first, and done last, just as if you were master. However, I'll secure the nuts."

She climbed up and stood at her full height, he holding her firmly by the hand; and she gathered three or four of the bunches. She tossed down half of them to him; and he sat, cracking his share, opposite, on pony-back, looking up at her; while she ate hers, standing on the step of the stile, and leaning over its top rail.

"Well, you haven't told me who you are, yet," she said, glancing curiously at his handsome face.

"You are the most amusing girl I ever met with," he exclaimed, laughing; "you have the oddest, bluntest manner,—such a whimsical way of speaking your mind. Most girls I have seen have had some timidity, some softness about them; but you—" He hesitated.

"I have nothing soft about me, I suppose?" she rejoined. "If I am blunt, you are rude. All boys are rude, but you are the rudest I ever knew."

"I don't mean to be rude,—I beg your pardon if I have been rude,—I only meant to speak the truth."

"As if anything could be more rude than to tell me it is true I am a blunt, plain girl, with no softness about me!"

"Stop! stop! now you are not speaking truly in repeating my words. I said nothing about 'plain.' You are not plain," he said, laughing, and looking straight at her beautiful face.

"Pooh! you know what I mean,—plain-spoken."

"Well, plain-spoken, granted," he returned; "but certainly not plain,—not at all plain."

And assuredly she was not. Kate Ireton, as she stood leaning over the stile, her white arms carelessly crossed on the ledge, her chin resting on them, her dark blue eyes flashing down at his, her full red lips pouting in childish petulance, her transparent complexion heightened and glowing, her bonnet hanging loosely back from her head, the strings only just keeping it round her throat, her bright brown hair blown in curly disorder about her face by the summer air, formed a strikingly beautiful picture.

"You think to please me by saying I am not plain," she said disdainfully; "on the contrary, it is a piece of impertinence in you—a boy—a stranger—to make any remark at all upon me, or my looks; upon my manners, or my face."

"You spoil the one by the other," he said; "you spoil your sweet looks by your tart words. It's a pity."

"And I tell you you are very impertinent to give any opinion in the matter. If I am plain-spoken, you are unmannerly."

"And why, if you choose to be the one, shouldn't I have equal right to be the other?" he asked, in a playful tone.

"Oh, now, there you are with your preaching again,—right and justice, and all that kind of thing."

"Can you deny it?" he said.

She did not answer, but kept looking at him thoughtfully. Suddenly she said, "After all, you have never told me who you are. What is your name?"

"A point-blank question," he replied, laughing. "Like yourself, plain-spoken,—quite to the purpose. I'll answer you as straightforwardly. Fermor Worthington."

"Fermor Worthington!" she echoed, in a tone of amazement. "Why, Fermor Worthington is a girl. You are no girl!"

"No, assuredly," he answered, gaily. Then a deep shade came across the boy's open, handsome face, as he said sadly "You have heard of one who is now dead. Had she lived, I should have had a sister; and I should have loved to have had a sister. The first Fermor Worthington died a child; and when I was afterwards born to my parents, they called me by her name. It is a family one, and has been used in ours for both boys and girls."

"And so you are Fermor Worthington!" said Kate, with a deep-drawn breath, as she kept gazing upon him with a complication of feelings, among which were tender memories, vague fancies, softened thoughts, together with that odd kind of vexed consciousness which so often mingled with her emotions when looking upon the picture at Worthington Court. Its breathing representative was there before her; the living brother, instead of the dead sister, whose childish image had stirred her heart with so strange an interest.

"I have seen a painting—a portrait"—she began.

"Yes—of her," Fermor said, in his grave, sweet, low-toned voice. "You know Worthington Court, then?—you have been there?"

"Often, with my nurse, Matty."

"You must come again—often; my father and I have just returned home—from abroad."

"Must!" repeated Kate; "'must come!' How fond you seem of commanding."

"And how afraid you seem of being commanded," he said, smiling. "But you have not told me who *you* are; I have told you my name—it is but fair you should tell me yours."

"Fair!" she echoed. "You make everything an order,—

your right, your due. But I don't mind telling you my name it is Kate Ireton. I am the niece of 'Squire Heathcote."

"I thought so! I guessed who you must be!" he exclaimed "I know your uncle very well—by what my father has told me about him. They were very intimate once—before my father went to live abroad. They were not only neighbours, but there is a kind of relationship—cousinship—between the families, I believe. I fancy you and I may claim kindred, if we please."

"And do you 'claim' it?" she said, with a slight emphasis on the word.

He noticed it, and answered with his quiet smile, "Nay, I would rather *you* 'pleased' to claim it."

She could not withstand his manner; and with a look reflecting his own, replied, "Since it is the first thing you have left to me, without any of your favourite ordering and dictating, I agree to be cousins with you. And as I find you so fond of sticking up for might and mastery, and likely to use your relationship by ruling me with a rod of iron, under pretence of right, and justice, and truth, and so forth, I shall give you a name that will suit you; I think I shall call you my Iron Cousin."

"Do so, if you will," he returned; "and I shall use my right to call you—not plain cousin Kate, but cousin Kate, plainly, without any ceremonious 'Miss' before the christian name, as so plain-spoken and unceremonious a girl deserves. And now, you will promise to come soon to Worthington Court? you will ask your uncle to bring you? My father's health is not strong; he goes out but seldom. I shall hope, therefore, that your good uncle will excuse form, and frequently come over and see him, as I fear he will not often be able to reach so far as Heathcote Hall."

"But cannot you come there yourself, now?" she said; "if you will, I'll take you to my uncle. I am sure he will be glad to see you."

"Nothing I should like so well!" he exclaimed; "I have always wished extremely to know the kind-natured, hearty 'Squire my father talked of."

The youth got off his pony, as he spoke ; leading him by the bridle, and walking by the side of Kate, as they chatted on together, proceeding through the lane, and up the park avenue, to the front entrance of the old mansion. During their conversation, Kate learned that Fermor had been brought up at a college on the continent, in the neighbourhood of the spot fixed upon by Mr. Morton Worthington as his residence, until he should have the power of returning to his patrimonial English home. This English home had been the secret object of pining wishes to both father and son. Fermor had lost his mother when very young. She was a cold, staid woman ; but there was one subject on which she was enthusiastic. This was Worthington Court ; she had fondly dwelt upon its beauties to her son, until she had inspired as strong an affection towards the old place in him as she felt herself. Mr. Morton Worthington, a man at once proud and sensitive, strict in principle, austere in practice, and stern in behaviour, yet profoundly susceptible ; formed and maintained a resolution never to revisit Worthington Court, until he returned to it as his own free and unencumbered possession. But his wife obtained leave, shortly before her death, to take her boy to England with her for a month ; and the mother and child spent that period together in the old beloved spot. It was ever after associated in Fermor's mind with the happiest time he had ever spent ; the only time he had seen his mother unbend into tenderness, and warmth, and affectionate unreserve. It became to him an image of peaceful seclusion, of home enjoyments, of loving intercourse ; and his intensest desire was directed towards the time when he and his father were to return thither for ever. England and Worthington Court had long been the centre of Fermor's dearest hopes and wishes.

Something of all this, Kate gained from what he said ; for Fermor Worthington was a singular union of frankness and quietude. He was perfectly candid, and had, at the same time, a firm, collected mien, a self-possessed strength in his demeanour, arising from steadfast convictions and innate rectitude, which gave him the peculiar air that had prompted Kate Ireton to call

him her "Iron Cousin." These characteristics were perceptible in Fermor Worthington as a boy; they were confirmed, as he grew into manhood.

When Kate Ireton made her appearance before her uncle, bringing with her her new-found relation, the 'Squire received them in his own hearty manner; giving Fermor a cordial welcome at once, and a warm invitation to come, whenever he pleased, to Heathcote Hall. He himself promised to ride over to Worthington Court without delay, that the old acquaintance between himself and his good friend Morton might be renewed; rejoiced that the long exile—self-imposed by filial duty and manly probity—being now over, permitted his excellent friend Morton and himself once again to be the good neighbours they were formerly; entered with glee into the rightful establishment of the cousinship; and congratulated the young people and himself upon this pleasant family re-union.

"Tell my good friend, your father, my dear young sir, that Kate and I will ride over the first thing after breakfast to-morrow to see him. Give him my best regards, and tell him so from me, my dear young Mr. Fermor."

"Do you treat me so formally, sir? Are we not all cousins?" said Fermor Worthington.

"True, true, my good young gentleman—cousin, I should say. But remember, we of the old school are apt to be a little formal, till we know people well. I feel that you and I shall soon know each other well—quite well—and then we'll be as familiar as you please," said the 'Squire, putting his hand upon the lad's shoulder.

"The more familiarly you treat me, the better I shall think of myself, sir," said Fermor, as he looked his sense of the 'Squire's kindly manner. "It will teach me to hope I may deserve your friendship. Friendship is a voluntary thing, you know; relationship is settled for us. Nevertheless, I am obliged to Fate for having made me a relative of yours, and of my cousin Kate."

"That's a very civil speech, for the unmannerly iron cousin!" said she. "Pity he's not always so complaisant."

"I am never complaisant at the expense of truth," he said. "Civil speeches should come from feeling, or they are but flattery."

"People may be decently polite, without flattery," returned she.

"Sincerity between relations is even better than politeness," said Fermor.

"There's no need to be a bear, because one's a cousin," she retorted.

"Certainly; cousins are human beings, not brutes," replied he. "We shall never be brutal to each other, I hope."

"I was not speaking of behaviour between us; I was speaking of yours to me," said Kate.

"Which I trust was not brutal—only honest," he replied. "I told you honestly what I thought of you; and I believe you were quite as frank with me."

"I've no objection to honesty; be as honest, as frank as you please; you can't be too much so, to please me. What I find fault with is your perpetual ordering and commanding; as if you were always right, and others were always wrong. You not only told me what you thought of me, but what I ought to be—what I ought to do."

"It is part of my honesty, I suppose," he answered. "When I see what I wish to be, and what I think should be, and might be, I am apt to say so, openly."

"Yes, you are for trying everything and everybody by your strict notions; and ruling them according to your sovereign will and pleasure—a true iron cousin."

"Well, I lay my sovereign commands on you now, not to forget your promise to be with us to-morrow by an early hour," he said, as he rose to take leave.

"My uncle's promise, not mine," she replied. "As his I engage to perform my share of it."

"Not unwillingly, I hope?" he said, smiling.

"Oh, no! I want very much to see your father—Mr. Morton Worthington. I have often heard him described; and I'm curious to see whether my nurse Matty is a good portrait-painter."

"What kind of picture did she draw!" asked Fermor.

"That of a stately, stilted gentleman; standing high on his goodness, and holding his head up on his principle," she replied; "in short, just what the iron cousin's father would be likely to be."

"He has good right to stand erect, who never stooped to an unworthy thought, word, or deed," said the son, earnestly. "When you see him, you will find that the likeness is faithful, and understand how it is so. My father's air is dignified, because his character is noble."



CHAPTER VIII.

NEXT day, the morning was farther advanced than the good 'Squire could have wished, when he and his niece drew bridle at Worthington Court. From some inexplicable whim of perverseness, Kate had contrived, by one frivolous pretext or other, to delay the time of setting out, from hour to hour, until far beyond that intended by her uncle; so that, when they reached the old mansion, they were informed by the servant who took their horses, that Mr. Worthington was receiving some guests who had arrived that morning, and that the whole party were assembled at lunch, in the dining-room. As his niece and himself were being ushered thither, the 'Squire learned that these guests were no other than the Whites, of Eggham Park; and on entering the apartment, there was a pale shadowy-looking lady, seated on one side of the table; next to her a younger duplicate of herself, with the addition of long flaxen curls; and opposite to them, an ultra-florid little gentleman. But the 'Squire saw no one, for the moment, but his old friend, Morton Worthington, whom he had always revered as a being infinitely superior, in every moral and mental endowment, to himself. His modest self-estimation made him think the intimacy which had subsisted between them, a generous condescension on the part of so wise, so good a young man as Morton Wor

thington ; and his regard for him was heightened by a sort of venerated gratitude, that he should permit the equality of friendship between them. The truth was, there had been a mutual esteem and liking, but little real confidence. Mr. Morton was habitually reserved ; and the 'Squire was simple-hearted and simple minded. Harry Heathcote had not the slightest idea that a large portion of Morton's liking for the brother, arose from the secret overwhelming passion he cherished, in spite of his own will, for his sister. No suspicion that the cold-seeming, scholarly Mr Worthington thought of Hetty otherwise than as a gay, thoughtless girl—pretty, but too childish to interest so wise and clever a young gentleman—ever crossed the mind of the unobservant 'Squire. He knew that Morton admired her ; and fancied that he tolerated her light trifling, in consideration of her youth and blooming looks ; but he dreamed not that these caprices made the misery of the proud student's life ; that this youthful bloom enthralled him beyond the power of his stern resistance. Morton Worthington's existence had been one continued haughty contest with inclination and circumstance. He had been rejected by the young girl whom he passionately loved, against his better reason and judgment ; and in order to conceal the anguish of mortification, as well as to punish himself for the weakness which he disdained, and resented having yielded to, he hastily married a woman for whom he had no affection, but whom he knew to possess prudence, steady principle, and a formed character—exactly those qualities lacking in Henrietta Heathcote. But the wound was only seared over ; it never healed. To this secret torture was added the gall and bitterness of discovering, on his father's death, that decay of fortune, and heavy debt, and threatened loss of his patrimonial state, stared him in the face. His pride of resolution, however, enabled him to preserve a show of stoic indifference to the world : and he repaired abroad, silently and privately to contend with his disappointments as he best might, and to look forward with the single hope of returning, at some future day, to recovered wealth and ease, if not happiness.

While the 'Squire hurried forward, in his own cordial, hearty

manner, to greet his old friend, and interchange a hundred questions and replies in a breath, Kate had plenty of time to make her own observations on the appearance of Mr. Morton Worthington; but not until she had perceived, with a feeling of vexed surprise, that his son, Fermor, was not there.

Presently, her uncle turned to her, as he said to his friend: "But I have not shown you my Kate yet. Come hither, Kate! I want my good friend to see what a treasure I have—bachelor as I am. You, Morton, have your son, Fermor—a fine boy, a noble, well-spoken lad—a fine fellow, indeed! But I have my pride and joy, too—my Kate, my niece, bless her! Where are you, Kate? Come hither!"

Kate came forward, at her uncle's bidding, and stood beside him; while he, eagerly taking off the broad beaver hat she wore, which somewhat shaded her features, said: "Hetty's daughter!"

As the young head stood revealed fully to his view, the marble face of Mr. Morton Worthington moved not a jot; but he turned to the table, poured himself out a tumbler of water, and drank it, ere he said, with a forced smile: "You are indeed fortunate, 'Squire, in possessing so fair a young lady, to be to you as a child."

"Do you find her like her mother? I see a strong resemblance myself; but I am curious to know what you think, who knew Hetty," said the good 'Squire.

Mr. Morton Worthington sat down. He had risen from his chair to receive the 'Squire, when the latter entered, and had since remained standing, answering the various hurried ejaculations and inquiries poured forth by his warm-hearted friend. As he resumed his seat, he attempted some muttered allusion to his having grown infirm since they last met; but the words died off unspoken, and there was a pause. The 'Squire thought he was about to reply to his last question, and waited patiently, turning Kate's beaver hat round and round in his hand, with his eyes alternately fixed upon her face and Mr. Worthington's.

But when that gentleman next spoke, it was to address Mrs.

White, offering her some of the sweets upon the table, begging her to resume her luncheon, and offering some to the newly-arrived visitors : at the same time introducing all his guests to each other.

The conversation became general, or rather, Mrs. White began a long interlocution with the 'Squire, in which she explained to him that Mrs. Mustley having been advised by her medical man to pay a visit to the sea-side, the old lady had left Eggham Park for Weymouth last week ; which gave Mr. White and herself the opportunity they were most eager for, of coming to welcome their excellent friend, Mr. Worthington, on his return from abroad ; then she branched off into a by-dissertation on the equal connection that existed between themselves, the Whites, and the two families of Heathcote and Worthington ; then ensued an episodical narration of the virtues and accomplishments which distinguished her dear daughter, Alicia, who was—though she said it, that shouldn't say it—the very dearest and most exemplary girl that ever breathed ; that she considered herself the most fortunate of mothers, and Mr. White the most fortunate of fathers, to be blessed with such a child.

Miss White was preparing melon for Mr. Morton Worthington ; requesting to know precisely what quantity of sugar he liked sprinkled over it, entreating he would tell her whether he preferred pepper with it, or whether he choose it quite simply ; and, while ministering to his palate, engaging him with small-talk with the most amiably insinuating manner conceivable.

Mr. White was immersed in the occult dressing, and subsequent inglutition, of a lobster, the colour of which was shamed by the flaming scarlet of his face, up to the very roots of his hair ; while his eyes emulated those of the shell-fish, by their startling black protrusion.

Kate drew a chair to her uncle's side, and under the shelter of his conversation with Mrs. White, sat silently eating her chicken and jelly, wondering within herself what could have become of Fernor Worthington, and how it was he did not make his appearance. " Why shouldn't I ask for him, and inquire how

it is he's not here?" at length she thought. No sooner had she asked this question, than she said aloud: "Where is your son, Mr. Worthington? We expected to see him this morning. He begged my uncle to come over, and to bring me with him: it is strange he is not here to receive us. Is he not at home?"

Her voice, fearless and unabashed, but full and musical in its tone, rang clear above those of the other speakers, as she addressed this question to the master of the house, sitting at the head of his table.

He perceptibly started; but he answered composedly, without looking towards her: "Fermor is gone out, young lady. I sent him over to Dingleton, upon a commission which could not be delayed."

"Yes, my Alicia left her parasol at the inn where the post-horses baited, and our kind host gallantly insisted that his own son should go in search of it, instead of a servant. It is not every youth who would be so assiduous, but young Mr. Fermor is one of a thousand, we all know!" prosed Mrs. White.

"Fermor does as I tell him, madam," said Mr. Morton Worthington.

"Very proper, of course," said Mrs. White. "All young people should learn to do as they are told."

"Is it 'very proper' to tell a boy to ride twenty miles for a parasol? Is it 'very proper' to let him do so, when a girl has been so forgetful as to leave something behind her that she deserves to lose for her pains?" said Kate.

"Hey-dey, young lady! I'm afraid our good friend, the 'Squire, has spoiled you not a little, to reason with your elders and betters, in that smart fashion," said Mr. White, looking up, for the first time, from his plate.

"Are elders always betters?" returned Kate. "Why shouldn't they be asked plain questions as well as any one else?"

"It isn't becoming in young ladies to question and argue," said Mrs. White. "I'm sure my Alicia knows better than to think of such a thing."

"How long has your son been gone, sir?" said Kate, again

directing her words to Mr. Worthington; "do you think he will be back soon?"

"Very probably he may," answered Mr. Worthington, still looking away from her as he spoke. He kept his eyes steadily averted from the young girl's face. He had only once permitted himself to glance towards her, after the first sight of her countenance; it was while she was occupied in eating her lunch; he had then, for one instant, looked at her keenly, intently, though stealthily; but from that time he preserved his fixed avoidance.

"I say, 'Squire," said Mr. White, filling himself out a bumper of wine, "allow me to drink your very good health, and, at the same time, to ask you how you think it right to encourage your niece to be so bold and up-spoken in company? It isn't the fashion for young ladies now-a-days, to do anything else than sit still and say nothing, until they're spoken to, and then answer discreetly and modestly. If you go on spoiling her, as you seem to have done, she'll never do you any credit—never be a pattern young lady! You'll excuse my freedom; but we're all friends; and I really feel anxious that your adopted daughter should do you credit, for her own sake as well as for yours."

"My excellent Mr. White, pray make no apology for speaking out freely; I take it kind of you, on the contrary, to tell us your mind, for our good, as you think it," said the 'Squire. "But, in the first place, I don't know that I care much to see my Kate a pattern young lady—it would be too much trouble for her and for me; and as long as she is not insolent, and hurts no one's feelings, what does it signify that she should speak up boldly, and without any mock modesty, her thoughts and her wishes? As for spoiling her—" and here the 'Squire fidgeted a little on his chair, but soon sank back into it quietly and passively—"as for spoiling her, why, perhaps I do, a little; but, you must know, I have my reasons—I have my reasons."

"Reasons, my dear sir!" began Mrs. White.

"My love, allow me," interrupted Mr. White. "Reasons, 'Squire!" he exclaimed, turning to him again; "can reason be pleaded in so unreasonable a proceeding as spoiling a young creature entrusted to our care?"

"My worthy Mr. White—my good sir," said the 'Squire; "if you knew all, you might perhaps allow that I have very sufficient reason for a little over-indulgence in the case of my niece, Kate." His voice changed from the placid equanimity it had hitherto observed, as he added: "Her mother was killed by severity—killed; and I took a vow by her dead face that her child should never know a harsh word or look from me. I have kept my oath; and perhaps this may account for my Katey being not quite so prim and orderly as she should be. But all in good time—all in good time. She's young yet, thank God!"

Mr. Morton Worthington, for all the infirmity of which he complained, had got up and walked to the window, where he stood, with his arms folded upon his chest, his back towards those present, his face looking out upon the terrace, with a blank regard.

"Dear, dear!—we were not aware—we heard there was a sad story, but the particulars were not known to us," commenced Mrs. White.

"My love, allow me," interposed Mr. White. "Under such peculiar circumstances as you have hinted at, my good sir, and for which we are, of course, too delicate to press farther, great allowance is to be made; of course, great allowance."

"Yes, great allowance should be made for Katey," said the 'Squire. "By and bye we'll think about proprieties, and knick-knacks, and reading and writing, and stitchery, and such like things, that girls must be taught, one time or other, I suppose," said the 'Squire, with a sigh.

"Why, surely, my dear sir, you don't mean to say that——" Mrs. White began.

"Permit me, my love," said Mr. White. "My good 'Squire, you will understand me to speak solely as a friend and connection of yours, and therefore with pardonable freedom, if I observe that your country-gentleman experience, and old world breeding, scarcely fits you to be a competent judge of what is expected now-a-days from a young lady of your niece's years. If, as I deduce from what you let drop just now, Miss Kate is actually uninstructed in even the very earliest branches of education, I assure you, you are

wrong in omitting to provide her immediately with means of remedying this defect. If she be permitted to grow up, thus neglected, when she reaches an age to understand her deficiencies, take my word for it, she herself will be the very first to reproach you for your irreparable omission,—your fatal over-indulgence.”

“How little you know me!” exclaimed Kate indignantly. “I reproach uncle! Not if he had done me the greatest of injuries, instead of making all my life happy. I should be the most ungrateful of girls, so much as to think a reproach towards uncle.”

“My dear young miss,” replied Mr. White, with a supercilious smile, “I see that you totally misconceive me, though that is scarcely to be wondered at; but what I would say is, that even were you hereafter to upbraid your uncle with his having failed to provide you proper instruction, the reproach, far from deserving the name of ingratitude, would be only just and due.”

“Impossible!” ejaculated Kate.

“I repeat,” resumed Mr. White, after a slight wave of the hand, as deprecating her interruption, “that such a reproach would be but just and due, a merely proper resentment of his irretrievable wrongs towards her.”

“Wrongs! ridiculous!” burst from Kate.

“My good young miss, you are wholly incapable of estimating the force of my meaning. I cannot wonder at it, ignorant as you, alas! are; but one day, when too late, you will remember my words, and comprehend their truth.”

“Never!” exclaimed Kate. “I shall never find out that it’s right to blame uncle.”

“Deaf to rational argument! blind to the most lucid demonstration, poor child!” said Mr. White, in a pitying tone, and making a motion with his hands, as though he gave up the hopeless task of parleying with one utterly unable to appreciate his powerful oratory.

“You think I ought to have Kate taught; that I should engage some one to give her lessons; to see that she learns something,” said the Squire, hesitatingly; “perhaps you’re right, my good Mr. White. Between us, I fear, Kate and I have

made the mistake of thinking only how to enjoy life together instead of recollecting that there must be some trouble, and some worrying, with books and such things, to live as we ought to do, I suppose."

"Assuredly, my good sir, undoubtedly," said Mr. White, briskly renewing his discourse. "You should engage a good governess. My wife will, I am sure, have the greatest pleasure in writing to some one of her large circle of acquaintance in town, desiring them to secure for you, without delay, a fashionable finishing governess, who will make up for lost time with our young friend here, and render her shortly an accomplished, well-mannered, presentable young lady, who will do credit to you and to herself."

"You are very good, very obliging, my worthy, excellent Mr. White," faltered the 'Squire; "but, but—there's no hurry—we'll see about it—I'll think, I'll consider of it, before you give your good lady the trouble to write for a governess for my Kate. I'll think of it, I'll think of it, thank you."

Just then, the grave deep voice of Mr. Worthington was heard to say, "Here's Fermor!" and presently Fermor appeared at the foot of the terrace, giving his horse to a servant; and then came rapidly up the flight of steps leading to the level space upon which the dining-room windows opened.

"If you were to unfasten that window near you, sir," said Kate, in her clear, penetrating tone, "he could come in at once, instead of going round."

Mr. Worthington again gave the slight involuntary start which the sound of that ringing, silver-pure voice (the very echo of one that had never ceased to haunt his memory), distinctly addressing him, had before produced, but he gave no other token of having heard her speak. Kate Ireton stepped forward, stood close beside him, and herself undid the fastening of the folding-window.

"We are here! my uncle is here!" said she.

Fermor advanced eagerly. As he approached the window, he observed his father; raising his hat, and entering the room.

he addressed his first words to him : " I have recovered the lost parasol, sir ; it was left at the previous stage to Dingleton ; so I rode on there at once, and brought it away with me."

" Very well," said his father.

Mrs. White pressed forward to overwhelm Fermor with thanks and apologies, while Alicia dropped a curtsey that would have done her dancing-master's heart good to see, as she received the parasol from his hands.

" Is ' very well ' all that you have to say to your son when he has done what you desire, sir ?" asked Kate of Mr. Worthington, as she remained near to him.

" What should I say more ?" replied he.

" Don't you think he deserves praise for obeying you, for doing even more than you desired ?" said Kate, earnestly. " He rode on in the dust and heat to the stage beyond Dingleton, when he found that what you had sent him for was not there. Doesn't that deserve something more than ' very well ?' "

" He knew my object in sending him ; he knew that I should be displeased if he returned without effecting it," said Mr. Worthington.

" And he did effect it," returned Kate. " Were you not pleased ?"

" I was satisfied," replied Mr. Worthington. He spoke as if with effort. While Kate was close to him, he seemed oppressed, constrained, unable to look, move, or breathe freely.

Fermor had exchanged cordial greetings with the 'Squire, and now came towards Kate, saying, " Will you come and pay a visit to your old favourite, the picture ? You made acquaintance with it before you knew any of us ; and it is but fair that your new friends should not make you forget your old ones."

" No fear of their doing that, good iron cousin. All the new friends and new relations in the world would never put my uncle or nurse Matty out of my head," she replied, with a spice of the contrariety which always took possession of her in connection with that portrait ; and which, indeed, was too apt, generally, to

actuate her conduct and speech. Boundless indulgence, unbalanced by wise admonition, generates a wayward impulse to say ungracious and unwelcome, rather than agreeable or complimentary things; and Kate had, moreover, an innate horror of any thing like flattery or affectation, which frequently caused her to err on the side of bluntness, from sheer dread of seeming false. She often bordered on the verge of incivility, not from any wish to be rude, but from an instinctive avoidance of any shadow of simulation.

"What is that you say about a picture, Mr. Fermor?" said Mrs. White. "My Alicia, for so young a girl, is a wonderful judge of painting; but no wonder, either, for she paints more than tolerably herself already, I assure you. The cat she did upon velvet, the other day, for a footstool for Mrs. Mustley, and the basket of flowers she coloured in poonah, for an urn-rug as a present to her godmother, Lady Niggle, were, I assure you, quite beautiful. I hope, if you are going to look at any family pictures, my Alicia may accompany you and Miss Ireton; she will be delighted to see them with you. Go, Alicia, my dear."

And the three young people left the room together.



CHAPTER IX.

WHEN they entered the morning parlour so well remembered by Kate Ireton, she was going straight to her wonted corner, the old-fashioned chintz settee in the recess, opposite to which the picture hung, when she suddenly drew back, and gave place to Alicia White, who advanced in front of the painting, and fell into ecstasies about the dear lovely face, the sweet pretty attitude, the darling white frock, the exquisite portrait altogether. She expatiated to Fermor on the extraordinary likeness between himself and his sister; uttered sentimental speeches of regret at his shocking loss, but supposed that as it had happened before he

was born, he had not felt it very deeply; and in short, talked a great deal of fluent propriety and prettiness, during which, Kate Ireton stood aloof, looking at the worked parrot with the twin cherries hanging from his beak, the embroidered sampler, and the gaping, new-caught fish.

As Miss White stooped to examine one of the two groups of family-miniatures that hung on each side of the fire-place, beneath the other picture, Fermor Worthington came over to where Kate was still standing, and said:—"I wanted you to have looked at that picture with me, by ourselves; but another day, perhaps, we shall have a better opportunity. I could not refuse Mrs. White to let Alicia come with us."

"You were quite right. Besides, I know the picture by heart; no need for me to look at it." She turned away as she spoke, and went towards a door that led into the adjoining apartment, which was the library.

"Do you like that room? It is my favourite room, in the whole house," said Fermor, following her.

"I don't know that it's my favourite; but I used to like to come here, and watch the shadows of the leaves, as they danced and fluttered upon the shining oak floor," said Kate. "I used to sit and ponder all sorts of fairy fancies, while I saw those twinklers running in and out, skipping to and fro, crossing, and crowding, and huddling together."

"Did you love those leaves? I could tell you some odd whims of my own about those same leaves," said Fermor, smiling. "But not now," he added; "here comes Miss White. Another time."

"No matter," said Kate.

"What a noble, spacious room! how finely proportioned! What an admirable music-room it would make! What a grand collection of books!" said Alicia White, as she entered the library. Miss White had a slight approach to a drawl, in her way of speaking, together with a habit of half closing her eyes, and holding her head on one side languishingly; but she talked enthusiasm, and strung raptures. "What a charming copy of

Tasso this is, Mr. Fermor!" said she, taking down one of the volumes, and opening it. "My kind papa gave me a beauty on my last birthday; but it is not so fine a one as yours."

"It is my father's, not mine," said Fermor.

"What have you there, Miss Ireton?" continued Miss White, addressing Kate, who was turning over the leaves of a richly illustrated book.

"I don't know; I was only looking at the pictures," said Kate, without hesitation, but colouring as she spoke.

"I should say—its name? What is the work? Look at the top of the page, or turn to the title," persisted Miss White.

"It's of no use if I did," replied Kate.

"Of no use?" repeated Miss White, innocently.

"No; I can't read it."

"You are not a German scholar yet?" said Fermor, as he stepped to her side, and glanced at the book. "It is Goethe's 'Hermann and Dorothea,' Miss White."

"I mean, I can't read; I can't read at all—anything—German or English," said Kate, with a crimson cheek, but firmly.

"Not read!" gasped Alicia White.

"No; I thought you heard my uncle say that I could neither read nor write, when he was speaking to your father, about my never having been regularly taught, in the drawing-room just now, before—before—Mr. Fermor returned."

"I thought we had agreed to give up the formal Miss and Mr. between us, Kate," said he.

"I did not know but that you might be unwilling to own for a cousin, one who is found out to be a dunce," said Kate. "I don't wish to hold you to your relationship against your will."

"Wait till I tell you I desire to give it up, before you offer to release me," replied Fermor.

"I shall wait for no such thing," said Kate, impetuously; "if I had so much as a notion you thought it a disgrace to be related to such an ignoramus as I have been shown to be—and as I am—I should not tamely wait for you to tell me so, I

should insist at once upon our calling each other cousins no longer."

"But I do not think it a disgrace. You have never been taught, you say; therefore it is no shame to you to be ignorant. It is a defect you can remedy; a defect you will remedy, by learning of your own accord, now that you have discovered your deficiency. No person of sense—and I think you have sense, Kate—will voluntarily continue without that, which lies in their own power to acquire. You will think it your duty to set about gaining knowledge immediately for yourself, since you have found out you need it; and if you do that energetically and earnestly, you are a cousin to be proud of—one to whom it would be rather an honour than a disgrace to be related. You must ask your uncle to give you a good instructress, without delay."

"'Must.' That is so like the iron cousin," said Kate.

"Are you and Mr. Fermor Worthington so nearly related, Miss Ireton?" said Alicia White; "I did not know you were cousins."

"There is cousinship of some sort between the families; and he is willing to own it, for the sake of the opportunity it gives him to exercise his love of authority," replied Kate. "All boys are fond of commanding, and showing their superiority; and my iron cousin is especially given to point out what he deems proper, expecting to see it observed, and himself obeyed."

"Which, of course, is a pleasure to you," simpered Miss White. "I wish I had a brother, or a cousin, to direct my actions; I should take such delight in showing my ready obedience to one who had the right to demand it—as, of course, male relations have."

"I agree to no such right," said Kate.

"Oh dear!" replied Alicia; "I know you're not saying what you think, now."

"I always say what I think," returned Kate.

"I am sure you are too well-bred, not to allow that a lady-like submission best becomes us girls in such cases," continued Alicia.

"I'm afraid I can't be very well-bred, since I don't know how to read ; and I seldom think of what is becoming," said Kate.

"But you have begun now to think it unbecoming not to be able to read and write, Kate, haven't you ?" said Fermor, with his quiet smile. "You will surely not think it wise or right to go on in your ignorance ? You will lose no time in trying to make up for that which has already been lost ? You will promise the iron cousin thus much ?"

"I don't like promising," said Kate.

"You don't like being bound ?" smiled Fermor.

"No," she said, in the same manner ; "nor do I like to break my word, which makes me careful of giving a promise."

"Then you shall not promise me ; but you shall do what I ask," replied Fermor.

"There's the iron cousin ! insisting on his will " laughed Kate.

He echoed her laugh ; and they returned to the dining-room.

As Kate and her uncle rode homewards, they both fell into deep thought. At length, the good 'Squire said, looking away from her, stooping down, and fidgetily patting his horse's neck :—"My dear, should you like to have a governess ?"

"Very much, uncle," answered Kate, with a bright, sudden up-glance, as if his words had pleasantly and unexpectedly chimed in with the subject of her own pre-occupation.

"No, really, should you ? should you, indeed, my dear child ?" replied the 'Squire, eagerly, in a tone of great relief. "I was afraid that, perhaps—I thought that, very likely, you might have—that, probably, my own bad example, and my neglecting to have you taught, might have caused you to think with dread of learning and lessons, and the rest of it. I fear that worthy Mr. White was very near the truth when he hinted that I had been culpably neglectful of your education, my dear ; we must try and repair our error, and think less of amusing ourselves with our rides and our rambles, and more of tormenting ourselves with stopping in-doors, to try and become something like what

Christians and gentlefolks should be. I never was much of a scholar myself; I never had any taste, nor any head, for bookishness and study; but I am not such an oaf as to pretend to despise knowledge because I can't master it; I can understand that it's a very noble thing for those who can master it, and that it's what every one should try to master, if their brains will let them. I ought, before now, to have given your young brains a chance; but we were so happy in our idleness, Kate—weren't we?—that I kept putting off and putting off the troublesome duty from day to day. However, I'm glad to find that my remissness hasn't made you unwilling to learn, but that you're ready to help me to mend my fault. I once hoped I should never have committed a fault where you were concerned, child," said the 'Squire, with a sigh. "But the best of us are but mistaken creatures in some one thing or other; and I, Heaven help me! am far indeed from the best, God knows."

"Dear uncle," said Kate, gaily, "I won't have you reproach yourself; I can't bear to hear you talk of faults and neglect. There have been none but what can well be made up for by diligence now. If you'll get me a governess, I'll work hard, and do my best to learn, so that no time shall have been lost."

"Thank you, Kate, my dear! I see your resolve to save me from blame—my own, which would be worse than all; you'll strive to become a clever girl for my sake—that no fault may attach to me. But you must mind and not overdo it either, Kate; take all gently—take all gently. We shall have you a first-rate scholar quite time enough. I mustn't have my little girl overwork herself."

"Never fear, uncle!" cried Kate, cheerfully. "But tell me," added she, presently, "have you thought of whom you shall have to teach me—to be my governess?"

"Well, Kate, my dear, I've turned it over in my mind a good deal, since that excellent Mr. White spoke so openly and so handsomely about the matter, this morning. But I think we won't go so far as to let his good lady send to town for the sort of governess he talks of. I think she would be—would be—per-

haps—too much for us ; eh, my dear, at first ? Suppose we go a little quietly to work, just at present, and begin with not quite such a finisher—finishing-governess, I mean ; a little less fashionable and finishing might, perhaps, suit us better—at any rate, at first. Eh, my dear ? What do you think ? ”

“ I think with you, uncle,” said Kate.

“ Well, then, I’ll tell you what has struck me, Kate, my dear. You must know, the last time I drank tea with our worthy vicar and his good wife, I met a friend of theirs, a young widow lady—poor thing !—whom they had had to stay with them for a time, while she looked about her—(they told me this when she left the room, in the course of the evening, to carry one of the children up to bed, who wouldn’t be satisfied without she did)—for a means of earning her livelihood, which the sudden death of her young husband, leaving her unprovided for, had rendered necessary. It seems she thought of trying to obtain a situation as a governess ; and I remember thinking, while I noticed how she attended to the little one that sat next to her at tea, leaning down to listen to his prattle, spreading some sugar on his bread-and-butter, when he whispered her for some, and afterwards humouring the young rogue, when he couldn’t be persuaded to unclasp his arms from about her neck, but insisted that she should go up stairs with him, and put him to bed herself ;—I remember thinking to myself that she was the very woman to make a good governess, and that she couldn’t fail to get engaged as one, very soon. What do you think, Kate, my dear ? ”

“ I think so, too, uncle ; and did she get an engagement ? ” said Kate.

“ That is what I don’t know, but what I think of ascertaining this very evening, by going over to the vicarage, and inquiring of our good Dr. Meadows whether his young friend has met with a situation that suits her ; and, if not, whether he thinks she would like to come to us, and be good enough to help me in my difficulty, by undertaking the charge of my little girl. What do you say to this, my dear ? ”

“ I say it is a capital idea, uncle ; and that you can’t do better than put it in practice.” said Kate.

Fortunately for the 'Squire's project, the young widow was found to be still disengaged. Both she and her friends at the vicarage gladly accepted the prospect of a home for her at Heathcote Hall; and gentle Mrs. Lindon was speedily installed there as the governess of its young mistress.

Blessed with a sweetness and evenness of temper, which her early acquaintance with sorrow had enhanced, rather than injured, chastened into resignation of spirit, and subdued into a mild serenity of demeanour, Mrs. Lindon was one of the meekest and tenderest of women. She shrank from uttering an opinion that sounded like opposition, a word approaching to thwarting, or a syllable that might be construed into disapprobation. Sensitive herself, she had a terror of inflicting pain by speech or look; and so careful was she of wounding others' feelings, that she kept constant guard upon her own, lest their heedless expression should chance to hurt by a seeming complaint or reproach.

With a timid, self-doubting child, such a natured woman would have been the very person, of all others, for its charge; but with a high-spirited, dauntless girl, like Kate, this extreme softness and yieldingness rendered Mrs. Lindon far from best fitted for the task she had undertaken. A judicious firmness, with dispassionate reasoning—a power to win her esteem, and command her respect, as well as to gain her affection—would have been the means just then of moulding Kate's character to its true capability, and of developing and perfecting those qualities in her nature which lay at present obscured beneath the less pleasant ones that had grown out of her position, and had been fostered by ceaseless and universal spoiling. A governess, whose character should have combined moral courage with loving-kindness—a woman who possessed a wise strength of nature with an affectionate heart, and who could have been capable of exercising salutary control, at the same time that she manifested how purely it was regard for its object's welfare which called it forth,—would have wrought the effect upon Kate's disposition, which was all it wanted, to display it in its outward working, as it intrinsically existed. But, falling into the hands of the easy, pas

sive, negatively-kind Mrs. Lindon, was only a continuance of the same course of uniform indulgence which had hitherto been Kate's moral and mental atmosphere; and no wonder that she remained, as she had ever been, sole directress of her own thoughts, words, and actions, which too often took a perverse shape and wayward expression.

There was, with all this, so true an indication of her really fine nature constantly shining through Kate Ireton's least gracious ways, that few could resist the charm of her beauty. She was not merely uncommonly handsome in face and person, but she had that radiant expression of a noble, unmean soul, which looked forth from her eyes, in clear, unmistakeable light, imparting a loveliness supreme and incomparable. In her most petulant speeches, in her frankest out-speakings, in her liveliest and most careless sallies, there was an absence of ill-temper or malice, that while it disarmed them of their sting, carried with it an irresistible conviction of true-hearted warmth and earnestness, seeming but another discovered grace.

Mrs. Lindon grew to love her beautiful, wilful pupil, with the same fond idolatry felt towards her by all the household. The governess's sense of right was often pained by the consciousness that the young girl profited too little by the instructions she was so able and so willing to impart; but she lacked the energy to enforce their necessity, and let the moments slip by for their regular inculcation. Kate's life-long course of unrestriction, made set lessons insupportably irksome to her; and she was never at a loss for some excuse to avoid going into the study of a morning at the appointed hour. Mrs. Lindon's habitual compliance, and dislike of opposition, joined to her personal kindness for Kate, made her continually yield to these pretexts, at the very time she felt the weakness of allowing them to prevail. This awakened a remorse that she was failing in her duty, both to the 'Squire and to his adopted daughter, in the small progress made by the latter; and then she would devise means of coaxing her pupil into more punctual study. But finding that the very sight of an arrayed table, with books and writing materials prepared, at a particular

time, only served to excite Kate's disinclination to set to work, Mrs. Lindon at length fell into the way of teaching, however and whenever she could, instead of at fixed periods. She would allow the nominal hour of studying to be eluded, and the walk or the ride to be substituted: while she contrived, during their strolls in the park, or their gardening, or their fishing, to instil as much instructive precept, and to impress as many intellectual ideas, as might be, in the course of their conversation.

Sometimes Kate would detect her gentle governess's device, and provokingly try to frustrate it, by a thousand tricks of pretended negligence and inattention; by frolicsome idleness, or by pertinacious stupidity; by darting off to something else, with a gay exclamation, or by a look of impenetrable dulness: but Mrs. Lindon's patience, though often severely tried, never forsook her, and she was rewarded by a certain amount of success.

Kate had naturally quick faculties, a comprehensive understanding, and innate good taste. She, therefore, insensibly imbibed a larger share of knowledge from these desultory lessons with her really well-informed instructress, than many girls acquire during a long course of schooling. She learned to think justly upon many points; she gained a large stock of ideas; she acquired a reverence for art, and an estimation of the value of literature. Mrs. Lindon had a passionate love of art, and she inspired her pupil with some of her own feeling. When first married, Mrs. Lindon had travelled in Italy with her husband, a young artist, whose insatiable desire to behold the glories of the great masters of Rome and Florence had conquered even the feebleness of disease, and had enabled him to hold at bay for a season the insidious approaches of decline. It had been the period of her happiness—transient, but most bright; and Mrs. Lindon reverted with tender enthusiasm to all that belonged to that journey. Love, painting, sculpture, music, poetry, and beautiful above all beautiful countries—Italy, were consociated in her mind, forming one blended image of delight and perfection. The only time that the gentle Mrs. Lindon lost her serenity of patience, was once when Kate forgot herself so far as to reply with a light, scoffing air, to some

words of loving memory which the young widow allowed to escape her, relative to that cherished subject.

The wound her feelings had received, showed itself in a few bitter, irrepressible tears, which, when Kate saw, she at first strove to harden herself against, walking disregardfully away, and taking no notice of them. But presently, when her better nature had had time to assert itself, she returned, saying: "You know I could not mean to hurt you by what I said. How can you take it so seriously?"

"True, dear Kate, I was wrong," said gentle Mrs. Lindon: "I should have remembered that you were young and thoughtless; it was my fault, to feel a heedless word like a cruel one."

Mrs. Lindon was ever readier to believe that she herself might err, than to rebuke her pupil.



CHAPTER X.

No one so often abetted Kate's want of application to her studies as her uncle. The good 'Squire would constantly be throwing out hints of the folly of mewing a young girl up in-doors, of letting her sit stooping, and poring, and puzzling over lessons, spoiling her shape, hurting her eyes, getting ill for want of pure fresh air and wholesome exercise, instead of sending her out for a good gallop on horseback, that would bring her back with cheeks like a rose.

Mrs. Lindon had some difficulty in reconciling these inuendoes with the instructions she had received when she first came to Heathcote Hall; which latter were, to mind and take pains with Kate's learning, and to make her a first-rate scholar in no time, that she might have done with troubling herself about globes, and maps, and slates, and copy-books, and school-books, and all the rest of the tribe of books, ever after. At first, in accordance with his expressed wishes, she turned a deaf ear to his hinted ones; but finding that they were only urged the more strongly and open-

ly, she took the course of obeying the present desire, whatever that might be.

One morning, just before the ostensible hour for Kate's lessons, the 'Squire had been wilfully dawdling over his breakfast, putting off as long as possible the moment for her to leave him, making one or two side remarks on the fineness of the day, and the sin it was to stay under a roof in such weather, &c.; when Mrs. Lindon, in the hope of evading the expected direct proposal for a morning's holiday, made her escape from the room, observing that she was going to the study, and that Kate would find her there, whenever she liked to come.

"Stay a moment, my dear; no hurry, no hurry; no need to hurry; the study won't run away, nor the books either—more's the pity, I was going to say. But what do you think of a brisk canter over to Worthington Court this morning? I hear my poor friend Morton has not been well; feverish, languid, I fancy. His health is not what it used to be, poor fellow; though he bears up bravely and without a murmur, as he always did, through his worst trial—when he had to leave the old place, and struggle abroad on a pittance."

"Bearing bravely is scarcely a virtue in such a man as Mr. Worthington!" said Kate. "He looks as if nothing could make any impression upon him—as if nothing touched him, nothing moved him."

"He's a staunch, noble fellow, indeed!" returned the 'Squire, thinking he was confirming her words. "But come, what say you to having the horses round, and going over to see him? It will be but kind; and it's a charming day for a ride, eh, Kate?"

"It is indeed," replied she, looking with longing eyes across the park, where all looked so sunny, and green, and bright.

"Then come, Kate; hang the lessons."

She laughed, in concert with her uncle's hearty good-humoured laugh; and they felt that the compact was made between them—when who should appear, coming up the avenue, but Fermor Worthington.

He entered, saying earnestly:—"I am come to fetch you;

you will not refuse me, I know. You will ride over with me to Worthington, and spend the morning with my father. He is not looking well, though he does not complain; but I know your visit will do him good."

"What visit?" said Kate, archly.

"The visit your uncle and you are going to pay him this morning," replied Fermor.

"I know of none such," said Kate. "I heard you settle one, and take for granted that it was about to be; but I don't see why that should decide the matter."

"It will decide you," he said.

"I am not so sure of that as you seem to be," she answered.

"I fancied Kate had already decided, and that we had agreed to go," said the 'Squire; "but it seems I was mistaken. She shall do as she pleases. I thought, my dear, you felt inclined."

"So I did—so I do—but—" she stopped.

"Then you will go," said Fermor.

"I didn't say so," she returned.

"If you feel inclined, why not go? Your uncle wishes it; I wish it," said Fermor. "You will ride with us."

"What a peremptory way you have with you!" said Kate. "How do you know I will ride? On the contrary, I ought to stay at home; you yourself would be the first to say I ought."

"Tell me why you think you ought, and I will tell you whether I think so too," replied Fermor.

"And your opinion is to guide mine?" she said.

"Not to guide it, but to confirm it," he answered. "You said I should be the first to say you ought to stay at home, did I know your reason; let me hear your reason, that I may judge."

"Judge for me whether I shall go or stay?" said she.

"Judge with you, whether you ought to stay at home, and give up your ride with us," he said, quietly and firmly.

"Give up my ride? How do you know it will be any sacrifice? Perhaps I prefer remaining at home," said Kate.

"No; you owned you 'felt inclined' to go," he returned.

"Very true; I should like to ride, I confess," said Kate.

"And your uncle and I wish to have you with us. It should therefore be some very sufficient reason, which induces you to deny yourself and us the pleasure," he rejoined.

"You will allow it to be most sufficient, when I tell you that it is because Mrs. Lindon is at this very instant expecting me in the study, to begin my morning lessons," said Kate, with a little air of triumph; "you know, you yourself urged me to work hard at them; and now you would have me put them off, to ride jaunting out with you and uncle."

"You are quite right; I withdraw my suit. You should let nothing interfere with your regular hour for lessons. I see; you must give up the ride," answered Fermor.

"But I see no such thing," said the 'Squire. "Why shouldn't my little girl and I enjoy ourselves, once in a way? I thought you were on my side, Fermor, my dear fellow!"

"I was, till I knew the obstacle to our wishes, sir," returned he. "But Kate says truly; she mustn't neglect her lessons; she must give up the ride."

"Nay, I said nothing of the kind; it was you who said the ride 'must' be given up," she retorted, with her saucy smile.

"And you will give it up; you will, of course, stay at home," he returned

"Why 'of course?'" she replied.

"Because you ought," he said, quietly.

"That does not follow," she said.

"It should. You yourself said that you 'ought' to stay at home; therefore, you will."

"I don't think I shall."

"No?"

"No."

Fermor looked grave. There was a pause, which was broken by the 'Squire, who said: "But, after all, why should Kate give up a pleasant morning, and disappoint us all three, merely to do a disagreeable task?"

"Because she has allowed that the task should be done; her own good sense has told her so, and she will not act against her own good sense," replied Fermor.

"Kate has excellent sense—excellent sense!" said the Squire; "but," added he, with a sigh, "what a pity it is there are so many disagreeable things in the world for our good sense to tell us should be done!"

"There is one redeeming point in disagreeables," said Fermor. "If they are done against inclination, at the prompting of good sense, and to fulfil what is right, they are converted into—if not gratifications—at least, sources of gratification. Distasteful things done for conscience' sake, become remembered pleasures."

"If so, it may not be unwise to lay up a store of them," said the Squire; "but it's a troublesome provision, after all, and, in the process, a great worry. Well," added he, "so we must be content to give up my little girl's company this morning; yet I should have so liked to have had her with us, in our ride over to Worthington Court."

"And so you shall, uncle; I mean to go," said Kate, without looking at Fermor. "I will not be two minutes putting on my habit, if you will wait for me."

"And welcome, my darling! Don't hurry—plenty of time; I'm only too glad to wait for you; and there are the horses to bring round. While you get ready, I'll ring and order them to the door. Away with you, Kate!"

There was a consciousness, a hurry, almost a trepidation, in the way in which Kate hastened from the room, still without looking towards Fermor Worthington. But when she returned, equipped for her ride, the sparkle in her eyes, and her slightly heightened colour, showed that she had resumed all her vivacity of spirit. The feeling that she was acting, as it were, in defiance of his words, and in opposition to what she knew to be right, made her, after the first moment, more than usually daring and careless.

The Squire, as they rode along, chatted happily with the

two young people, evidently enjoying his ride with them through the pleasant park glades, and green lanes, with the air blowing freely around, and the sun shining brightly among the trees, which yielded sufficient shade to screen off the noontide heat. The talk chanced to fall upon the beauties of Worthington Court; and Fermor, encouraged by the sympathy of the friendly 'Squire, gave full vent to the feelings that swelled his heart towards the old place.

"I have been told that you Worthingtons were a proud race," said Kate. "Your attachment to the dwelling of your forefathers is an instance of the family pride. To hear you enlarge upon its merits, one might believe that there was not such another estate in all the broad lands of merry England."

"I really think there is scarcely its match," he said, laughing. "I own my weakness in favour of the dear old place."

"The iron cousin owns to a weakness! He has, then, some vulnerable points!"

"Who has not?" he returned.

"I should like to find them out," she said; "there would be a wicked pleasure in worrying them."

"And there would be a folly in not trying to conceal them, to foil your wicked pleasure, since it is thus owned," replied Fermor. "It shall be my care, in future, to guard any others I may have from discovery; but as this one foible is known to you, and it is vain to deny it if I would, you must be allowed to tease it as much as you will."

"Teasing a weakness is doing it a kindness," said she; "it puts it out of countenance, teaches it to be ashamed of itself, and to make way for strength, which manfully comes forward, and takes its place."

"True," he said; "but I have a strong love for Worthington Court; it will take a mighty power to uproot it. I should not have called my regard for the old place a weakness; 'tis a strength—the strength of affection."

"And the strength of prejudice," she rejoined. "Why, you would fain have us believe that everything at Worthington Court,

as well as Worthington Court itself, is superlative. I dare say, you are ready to prove that the honeysuckles which grow round the library window at Worthington are finer than those which hang so profusely, and in such rich clusters, round yonder porch," she said, pointing to a cottage they were approaching.

"Goody Johnson is a tenant of my father's, and her honeysuckle happens to have been a slip from the original plant that runs up one side of our old mansion," said Fermor, smiling. "I told you, you know, Kate, I had whims of my own about that woodbine, the very leafy shadows of which won your childish fancy. I confess to a predilection—prejudice, if you will—in favour of the peculiar merits of the Worthington honeysuckles. Leaning on my mother's lap, I learned to see a beauty in them, that no other flowers have since possessed for me. When we were abroad, I remember, no scent of orange grove, or 'spiced Italian air,' ever seemed to me laden with half the welcome fragrance that lurks so richly, yet so revivingly, in those simple honeysuckle blossoms. Coming suddenly upon a plant of those flowers, in ever so alien a scene, was sure to fill me with associations of home and its pleasant images. A whole atmosphere of content and refreshment lies in the scent of honeysuckle—to my sense, at least!"

Kate was almost startled at this burst of enthusiasm—so unusual in the tranquil-spoken, quiet-mannered Fermor—and about a flower, too; but she was just going to break the silence which followed his speech, when an old woman in a red cloak, and a black silk hat tied under her chin, came out of the cottage, and, seeing Fermor Worthington, dropped him a curtsy, and asked how his honour's father was.

Fermor answered her inquiry kindly, adding: "We have been admiring your woodbine, Goody. The plant thrives finely with you; but I can't allow that it rivals ours yet."

"Lauk, no! Surely not! But it do come on main well too. See, it be clambered up right over the porch. I can scarce reach up to the blossoms now, they be got up so high."

"I wish you would try and gather me a few, though, Goody Johnson; they are beautiful," said Kate Ireton.

"That I will, my bonny young lady," said the old woman; "I'll go get a chair in-doors, to stand upon; for I tried last night to hook down some, while I was on the ground, and couldn't anigh reach 'em."

"No matter, Goody," said Fermor: "I will give Miss Ireton some at Worthington Court; we are going there now."

"And, of course, the Worthington honeysuckles I am to think better worth having," said Kate. "For my part, I cannot see that everything belonging to Worthington Court has a peculiar charm. What hinders these cottage beauties from blooming quite as finely as your aristocratic flowers? I shall encourage no such proud fancies. Thank you, Goody," she said, raising her voice, "I shall be glad if you will get the chair, and gather me some of your lovely flowers."

The old woman pattered away for the chair, brought it forth into the porch, and stood upon it; but it was no use; the sprays hung just above her finger-tips.

"I'll set the chair round there, outside," said Goody Johnson. "It blossoms lower down, yonder, by the stem."

"I will gather you as many as you please from the study-window," said Fermor Worthington, in his low, earnest voice; "I would rather you had some of those—I wish you to have some of those."

"But if I have a fancy for some of these?" she replied, with her eyes perversely fixed upon the old woman's efforts; while Fermor looked down in silence, and sat smoothing his horse's mane, abstractedly, with the head of his riding-whip.

At length, Goody Johnson succeeded in getting a few sprays, and brought them with many curtsies to Kate; who, receiving them with a gracious nod and a smile of thanks, rode on, accompanied by her uncle and Fermor.

They found Mr. Worthington sitting out upon the terrace, under a spreading sycamore tree, which grew at one end of it, and formed a shady canopy to a garden-seat placed there.

He seemed feeble, but stiff in reserve as ever; his frame bent and languid, his spirit rigid; his physical energies yielding to

depression, but his moral determination inflexible; with that same pale, cold, austere face.

After the first greetings between himself and his warm-hearted friend the 'Squire, and a sort of distant half bow, with averted look and compressed lips, in reply to Kate's salutation, submitting his hand to be shaken by her rather than shaking hands with her, Mr. Worthington turned to his son, and said—"Fermor, how came you to neglect speaking to Williams this morning about those exotics, as I bade you?"

"I am very sorry, father; I quite forgot to see him before I rode over to the Hall; I was so eager to ask 'Squire Heathcote to come and see you, and spend the morning with us, that your orders to Williams totally slipped out of my head till this moment."

"I'll thank you to observe my express instructions better in future; go and seek Williams now; he is somewhere about the grounds. If you do not readily find him, step on to the gardener's house, and desire his wife, or some of them, to send him up this afternoon; I'll speak to him myself."

"I assure you I really am very sorry, sir," began Fermor, again; but his father interrupted him with, "There—no matter, go at once. You are only creating farther delay by waiting to express sorrow for what a little more thought at the right time might have prevented from occurring. Go, when I bid you."

As Fermor withdrew, the 'Squire said, "It's a pity you thought it necessary to send him away from us, Morton; your gardener's house is a good step from here, if I recollect; it lies down near the clump of maples, by the south entrance, doesn't it? Why, we sha'n't have Fermor back with us much before we return; and he's too good a young fellow for me not to wish him here while we stay."

"It will be his own loss; so much the worse for him if he be not back in time to enjoy your visit; but he deserves to lose a gratification, since he has been guilty of a fault," replied Mr. Worthington.

"'Guilty!' 'Fault!'" exclaimed Kate. "You treat for

getfulness as guilt—omission as a misdeed? Errors are crimes, then, with you, sir?" she said, with a bright, indignant light in her eyes.

Mr. Worthington felt, rather than saw, this glance; for he never let his look meet hers.

"Young lady, I think that error, too leniently passed over, is liable to grow into crime; therefore I tear up the evil weed in its bud. It has been said,—'better a little chiding than a great deal of heart-break.' I reprove my son on that principle."

"And you are not sorry to inflict upon him a little penalty,—or to let one fall to his share,—as well as to give him a reproof? If he miss a pleasure, he may take it for his pains,—the wholesome pains, you think, he ought to endure. Smart justice! Sharp teaching!"

"Scarce so smart or so sharp as your speech, young lady; my good friend's leniency towards your glib tongue may prove its mischief hereafter. What is now tolerated as the pretty liveliness of a forward young girl will be resented as offensive and unbearable in the woman. But 'tis none of my affair, thank heaven!"

Kate was silent for a moment or two; during which, she stood earnestly regarding Mr. Worthington's face, as it remained fixed and colourless, turned from her, with the gaze directed out beyond the terrace.

"Why do you never look at me when you speak to me?" she said, suddenly.

Mr. Morton Worthington shrank as if a wounded nerve had been touched; but his countenance continued unmoved, and his voice was unshaken as he answered, "I am not accustomed to be questioned."

"Does it offend you?" she asked.

"It is of too little consequence to offend me," he answered; "nevertheless——"

"If it does not offend you, I may surely ask you the truth. Why do you never look at me? You look at uncle, you look at Fermor, when you address them; but you never let your eyes rest upon me for an instant. Do you dislike me?"

There was a tremulous tone in the young girl's voice as she uttered the last words, so different from its usual clear, firm sound, that it went straight to the innermost depths of Mr. Worthington's heart, with a force beyond his power to resist. It had been the work of years with him, to strive to repress every outward token of an inward susceptibility which he resented in himself as the one defect of his nature. He had subjected his feelings to so strict a forbiddance from outward betrayal, that, joined to his natural marble exterior, he had succeeded in preserving a frozen incrustation of superficial impenetrability; but there still lurked a hidden fire, which, spite of all his efforts, burned with intense, consuming glow, and in moments of sudden surprisal, asserted its fierce prerogative. Such a moment was the one in which the daughter of her who had been the object of his boyish idolatry—who was his first and only love—asked him in her girlish, faltering voice, if he disliked her—her, Hetty's child, Hetty's living image.

For one instant only he let his glance wander passionately over hair, eyes, cheeks, lips, all so faithfully replicating those mirrored in his heart,—that face which lived so indelibly and immortally there, though dead upon earth; for one brief instant he permitted his soul to identify and acknowledge the perfect resemblance, as he had once—and but once—suffered himself to do before. But soon his long habit of self-control prevailed. It enabled him sternly to fold his arms upon his breast, and with a glassy eye and frigid aspect, to say, “‘Dislike you?’ Ah, no! But I dislike questioning; I object to it,—I disapprove of it, as wholly unbecoming in young people. Wait till you are of my age, young lady, before you allow yourself to question too closely those around you.”

And then, turning to the 'Squire, and pointedly addressing him, he seemed to close the colloquy between himself and Kate

CHAPTER XI.

KATE IRETON, finding that her uncle and Mr. Worthington were soon engaged in a discussion of some county affairs that mutually interested them, walked away to the end of the terrace by herself. She stood there some little time, looking thoughtfully upon the ground; and then she rambled into the morning parlour and seated herself in the old nook, on the chintz settee, opposite to the picture of the seraph faced child, with its soft, blue eyes, and gentle smile,—the first Fermor Worthington. Vague shadows of thoughts chased each other through her mind as she sat there, with her eyes dreamily fixed upon the painting. Her half-playful, half-wilful contention with Fermor, respecting the choice between the pleasure-ride and the duty of staying-at-home; her perverse decision to come in defiance of him and of her own better promptings; her captiousness during the ride—the natural result of her previous act; her sallies with Fermor's father; her ponderings why he should think it requisite to be so sternly undemonstrative, since she felt a secret persuasion—arising from she knew not what instinctive source,—that he was not so totally unsusceptible in reality as he chose to appear;—all these, by turns, floated through her mind. Upon the latter topic she dwelt for a time, revolving Mr. Worthington's strange ansterity, his resolutely repulsive manner, his cold averted eye, his rigid, marble countenance. Something of what her nurse had hinted, in past times, of still other past times, came dimly into her memory, as furnishing a curious clue to the mystery. Could it be that that haughty, reserved man shrank from encountering her look because it recalled to him that of her mother? Did he hate her because she reminded him of one who had slighted him? Or did he but avoid looking upon her face because it resembled the only one which had had power to shake him from his pride of impenetrability? As this last idea struck her, the young girl uttered a

low, short laugh, of involuntary triumph; which, nowever, gradually subsided into a murmured tune, as she continued to gaze upon the sweet, mild face of the child in the picture. Insensibly, even her soft under-song became hushed, and tears gathered in her eyes as they remained fixed upon that fair, innocent countenance, from which the spirit of goodness and purity shone out. It seemed to shed a benign influence upon her feelings, chastening them of their least good tendencies, developing their better impulses, and inspiring them with higher, wiser, and nobler resolutions. But the deeper this influence, the more sensitively did it seek to shroud itself from acknowledgment or observation. It seemed like something sacred; too hallowed, and too solemn, to be analysed even by herself. With a start of angry shyness, therefore, Kate Ireton sprang to her feet on hearing an approaching footstep, while still immersed in rapt contemplation of the picture.

It was Fermor Worthington, who, finding her no longer on the terrace with his father and the 'Squire, had come in search of her.

"You are here! I thought I should find you here!" he exclaimed, with his full, sweet voice, which had a peculiar depth and fervour in its inflexion, when he felt deeply—the only point varying from the quiet self-possession and tranquil firmness that characterized the Iron Cousin's whole being. "I knew you would be here!" he said, as he glanced at her moistened eyes, and then at the painting.

"How should you possibly 'know' it?" she said, with an ungracious emphasis on the word, and turning abruptly away.

"I was sure—I felt sure," he replied.

"You make sure of everything you suppose. Why should you feel so sure that I should be here?" she said.

"Your own eyes show me that I was right in the belief which taught me to be so sure," said Fermor.

"Pshaw!" she exclaimed, hastily drying her eyes with her handkerchief; "you think I have been crying! Well, I scorn to deny it. Yes; I was fool enough to shed tears over my own

absurd fancies; but I could laugh now, heartily, at my own folly, in having indulged them." And Kate, in the midst of her attempted show of mirth, wept for a few moments, irrepressibly, from mingled mortification, generous disdain of telling a falsehood to conceal that which she would fain have hidden, sudden reaction of her late silent emotion, and a vexed sense of exposure and self-betrayal.

"Why should you be ashamed of feelings that do you honour, rather than lower you, in the sight of one who is not, I hope, without feeling himself?" said Fermor.

"I care not for my feelings to honour me in the sight of any one; I would have them kept out of sight—from the sight of the Iron Cousin, above all," she said hurriedly.

"Why so?" he said, with surprise.

"He humours my folly; he excuses my absurd crying; he affects to sympathize with it, that I mayn't see he is laughing at it."

"You do me injustice; you misunderstand me; I am incapable of laughing at genuine emotion. There is nothing I so truly respect—nothing more fervently admire."

"It is not a thing for admiration; it should not be seen," she returned, vehemently.

They had passed through the glass door, leading from the morning-parlour on to the terrace; and, stepping on a few paces, in the eagerness of talk, had paused just beneath the library-windows. Kate, in the irritability of her contending feelings, now stood cutting and switching the straggling blossoms near her, with her riding-whip, as she spoke.

Fermor Worthington bore it for some time, though wincing involuntarily each time a flower was stricken off. At length he said:—"I cannot bear to see you do that—I wish you would refrain; I do not like to have those honeysuckles ill-treated,—by you, above all."

"The Iron Cousin care for such things!" she said, in a scoffing tone of wonder.

"The Iron Cousin, as you call him, has some soft places in his heart," said Fermor.

"And in his head, too, I should think!" she answered "else, he would never have such odd whims about a few flowers."

"I have told you I have very particular fancies concerning those honeysuckles; they are dear to me, for many reasons. I cannot bear to see them ill-used; especially by you, Kate."

"And why by me, pray?" she returned.

"It makes you seem hard, disregardful, unfeeling, unfeminine; and I don't think you are either."

"How do you know? Perhaps I am," she replied.

"No," he answered quietly; and as he said so, glanced at her eyes, which were still red with her recent emotion. She understood his look; for she coloured, and was silent.

"Why do you take pleasure in appearing less kindly than you really are?" said Fermor. "You seem as anxious to make yourself out unamiable, as other girls are to pass for all that is sweet and charming."

"I have no ambition to appear other than I am; I would not, if I could, pass myself off for one whit cleverer, or pleasanter, or better, than I really am," she replied.

"But why make yourself out worse?" smiled Fermor.

"And why do you take me to task?" retorted Kate, as she arranged the flowers she still held in her hand, which she had brought from the old woman's cottage.

"Because I would have my cousin Kate appear no less gentle-hearted than I believe her to be. Come," he added, "let me gather you a few of these honeysuckles that I have a liking for, instead of those which are nearly faded; or I shall think you only retain them out of contradiction, and because you will not oblige me."

"Think what you please," said Kate, as she went on forming them into a nosegay, which she placed in the bosom of her habit; "I cannot help the Iron Cousin's hard thoughts; they're part of his nature, I suppose. And why," she added, "should I humour his prejudice, by allowing that the Worthington woodbine surpasses Goody Johnson's? For my part, I cannot perceive any difference"

It was not that Kate wanted sentiment, or that she was devoid of feeling. But she had a sort of shy tenacity about showing either. The more conscious she was of any powerful inward emotion, the more chary was she of disclosing it; as if there were a sort of affectation in permitting it to betray itself. She had a kind of impression that it was more honest, more sincere, to err on the side of apparent want of feeling, than to discover any traces of what might chance to seem acting. She had never had any one with whom she could confidently discuss her own feelings; and no wonder that her unaided judgment, joined to her peculiar nature—high-spirited and frank—and her peculiar situation, indulged on all hands, led her into the mistake of confounding bluntness with candour, and a show of insensibility with genuineness of character. Besides this, whatsoever exercised the strongest influence upon Kate's imagination and good feeling, possessed at the same time a strange power of exciting her less amiable demonstrations; thus, the picture of the blue-eyed child had always produced singularly antagonistic effects upon Kate, rendering her at once really gentler, and apparently more peevish, more inwardly softened, more outwardly irritable. And now, the more she felt the growing influence of every word, every look, of Fermor, the more she treated him carelessly and petulantly. The more she felt herself secretly affected by his opinions and wishes, the more she behaved as though indifferent to either. His rich-toned voice, combined with so calm and grave a manner, peculiarly moved her, appealing, as it did, to her taste, her imagination, and her feeling; and accordingly, the more conscious she was of its effect, the more did it actuate her to harsh, ungracious reply.

"No difference, perhaps, in the shape, the scent, the colour—the general fineness, in short, of the blossoms, as a gardener might judge them," said Fermor, in reply to her last speech; "still, in my eyes, these same dear old Worthington honeysuckles are the very sweetest, most delicious, and most perfectly beautiful flowers in the whole world."

He pulled a spray towards him, as he spoke, inhaling its

balmy breath, and passing his hand gently and caressingly beneath each blossom, as it yielded its treasure of beauty and perfume to his enjoyment.

Suddenly Mr. Worthington's voice was heard, calling to his son, from the other end of the terrace. Fermor let go the branch, and hurried away to his father. As he disappeared round the angle of the building, Kate stood watching the vibrating spray, still in slight motion from the impetus it had received when it left his hand.

Acting upon some instantaneous but irresistible impulse, she stepped forward, plucked the spray, and hastily substituted it for the one she had already; while she tossed the latter over the parapet of the terrace, as she ran onward in obedience to her uncle's summons, which at that moment reached her ear.

She found Mr. Worthington and the 'Squire in the same spot where she had left them, on the terrace in front of the house, beneath the sycamore. Some discussion seemed to be taking place, as to whether Fermor should accompany them back to Heathcote Hall, an arrangement which the 'Squire eagerly urged.

Mr. Worthington said, "Fermor may decide for himself; he knows best whether he should go or not. I say nothing of my own wishes; I have scarcely any on the subject; I am accustomed to be alone, without feeling dull. But he shall judge whether it be quite civil to absent himself, when our neighbour, Sir Dullarton Ditchley, talked of calling to see us this afternoon."

"I am quite ready to stay at home, father," said Fermor. "Thank you, 'Squire, another day I will ride over to Heathcote Hall," added he; "perhaps to-morrow I may be able; I trust so."

"Do, my dear young fellow," he returned. "But I could have wished you to come now; the ride back together would have been so pleasant."

"It would," said Fermor, as he accompanied the 'Squire and Kate to the foot of the terrace-steps, where their horses stood;

"but my father would, I know, prefer my remaining, therefore I shall remain."

"You know best, my dear fellow; but for once, surely——stay, Kate," said the 'Squire, interrupting himself, as he lifted his niece to her saddle, and observed that in mounting her, he had disengaged the flowers from her bosom; "you mustn't lose your honeysuckles; you made the old woman get them for you, and brought them all this way so carefully, that I suppose you set some store by them; it would be a pity for you to leave them behind you, after all." And as he picked up the dropped honeysuckles, he turned, laughing, to Fermor Worthington, and said, "Upon my life, I think Kate was quite right; and that Goody What's-her-name's woodbine is the finest ever seen. Why, it's as fresh as though it had just been gathered."

Fermor looked at the unwithered flowers, and then glanced at Kate Ireton's face; it was turned slightly away, and the drooping feather of her riding-hat partly concealed it; but the portion of her cheek revealed was crimson.

"They are not worth stooping for, uncle," she said; "let them lie; I do not want them."

"Nay, my dear, they are not a bit faded," said the 'Squire; "you'd best have them; they're as good as ever. I can hardly believe they were gathered more than two hours ago."

"They were not," said Kate, who, with all her faults, would not have told an untruth to save herself from the bitterest mortification.

"How do you mean, my dear?" said the 'Squire.

"No matter; throw them away, and let us be gone. Indeed I do not care for them now," she said.

"Well, my dear, as you please; but I really thought you seemed anxious to have them at first."

"Ay, at first, perhaps, but not now; I've had enough of them; fling them down, and let's away at once, dear uncle." She nodded a hasty farewell to Fermor, as she put her horse into a brisk canter; and the 'Squire, setting foot in the stirrups, bade his young friend good bye, and galloped after her.

As Kate and her uncle rode out of sight, Fermor Worthington took up the discarded honeysuckles, and wandered on thoughtfully along the smooth velvet turf from which the broad stone terrace rose that surrounded the mansion on all sides.

As he held the flowers, smelling to them, and looking wistfully at them, while he strolled on, in a sort of reverie, his foot touched something that lay upon the grass. It was a small bunch of the same blossoms as those he had in his hand, but faded and drooping. As Fermor leaned down to examine it more nearly, a bright smile passed over his face, and he grasped the flowers he held still closer; then he turned away quickly, and ran up the nearest flight of steps leading on to the terrace, crossed it, and entering the house by one of the glass-doors, went straight up stairs to his own room, where he poured out a glass of water, and carefully placing the stems of the honeysuckles within, he went down to the terrace again, and joined his father.

"So you did not return with your friends, Fermor?" said Mr. Worthington, as his son approached.

"You left the choice to me, sir," replied Fermor, "and I chose to remain."

"But you wished to go with them, perhaps?"

"I did, sir; but I preferred staying, when I found that you would have to receive that prosy Sir Dullarton by yourself. You have not been quite well,—this warm weather makes you languid; and to have to entertain him alone, would not have helped to improve your health, or to raise your spirits."

"There is nothing amiss with my spirits,—I hope I am not subject to the weakness of variable spirits," said Mr. Worthington, haughtily. "That a man should suffer himself to be depressed or elated by a cloud or two more or less in the sky, seems to me absurd,—an unworthy folly. If, however, I unconsciously am affected by atmospheric influences, and, in fact, become dull and spiritless without being aware of it, I should be sorry to have you hold yourself filially bound to so melancholy a companionship. Pray, therefore, make no scruple in seeking associates more congenial to your age or taste. That you should be attracted by the

cordiality and simplicity which characterize the worthy 'Squire, I do not wonder; but that a lad of your discernment should see anything agreeable in that malapert girl, that niece of his, passes my comprehension."

"Kate is unusually frank-spoken and fearless," said Fermor; "but it appears to me that she is as free from intending offence, as she seems unaccustomed to guard or consider her words."

"Want of consideration is a part of want of feeling; and an unfeeling girl is an odious creature," replied Mr. Worthington.

"Kate is not unfeeling," said Fermor, as he recollected the expression of her face and her brimming eyes, when he found her alone in the morning-parlour, opposite the picture of his dead sister.

"May be so," replied Mr. Worthington. "She may not be totally without feeling; but she has a negligent ease in the presence of her elders, a certain unquailingness of eye, and unscrupulousness of tongue, that argue little for her delicacy or sensitiveness of feeling."

"She strikes me as being self-possessed, because she sees no cause of embarrassment; and open in look and in speech, because she has nothing to conceal," said Fermor. "Her unbashfulness appears to be rather that of an artless, open nature, unconscious of any reason for reserve, rather than the effect of immodesty, or a wish to wound or insult. It is sometimes a little startling, for it is unusual; but once believe it to spring from neither boldness nor rudeness, and it ceases to be offensive or disagreeable. Nay, to me, there is something quaint and attractive in her manner; it interests me; it is original; unlike the ordinary demeanour of girls of her age; peculiar to Kate, but not unpleasant."

"However you may soften her defects, boy, because you find her an amusing companion just now," said Mr. Worthington, "she certainly has one radical imperfection. She lacks the principle of *respect* in her character; a terrible deficiency in any one, but particularly in a woman. She respects nobody. All those among whom she has lived, have been so situated with regard to her, as to inspire affection, but not respect. Her nurse, Martha; her

governess, Mrs. Lindon; even her uncle, she loves rather than respects. They have all humoured her, instead of leading her to look up to them; and have been contented to win her fondness, without having taught her reverence and esteem."

"Does not this prove that her position, rather than herself, is to be blamed for the defect you speak of, father?" said Fermor.

"Perhaps so," returned Mr. Worthington; "but the defect exists, and whoever lives to see it, will find that this want of deference and suavity,—which in one so young is deemed not only excusable, but rather adding to, than detracting from, her pleasant qualities,—is an unfeminine, unloveable characteristic. It will then be felt to be a moral blemish, which all the charms of person and mind she may possess, can hardly outweigh; and which unless some mighty motive operate to cure, will remain inveterate to her life's close. However, to recur to the present; I can conceive that to you, her equal in age, this want of respect is no detriment; her liveliness amuses you, her pertness is an exercise for your temper and forbearance, her sauciness and flippancy a trial of your power in retort; a boy-and-girl war of words, naturally enough possessing some charms for those engaged in it. As I said before, I have no wish to prevent your prosecuting an acquaintance which promises to provide you with entertainment, when my society proves irksome or monotonous. Use your own pleasure in the matter."

"Your society can never be otherwise than most precious to me, father," said Fermor Worthington; "my greatest pride is when you desire to have me with you—my greatest happiness, when I can hope to contribute to yours. My pleasure is your will. Let me know it, that I may fulfil both."

"You spoke of riding over to Heathcote Hall to-morrow; do you still intend to go?" inquired his father.

"Not, if you prefer that I should remain at home," replied Fermor.

"I speak of your preference, not of mine," said Mr. Worthington, as he rose from his seat, and left the terrace to go to the library; "I give you an option; use it."

"I will remain with you, then, father," said Fermor; "lean upon my arm; your step is feeble; the afternoon is sultry. I will draw the couch over to the open windows; it is cool and shady there. The sun has gained here"

. . .

CHAPTER XII.

It was many days before Fermor Worthington felt that he could, with a perfectly free inclination and spontaneous resolve, go over to Heathcote Hall. He said the simple truth, when he avouched that his father's will was his own pleasure. He had no stronger desire than to satisfy his father's every wish, and to promote his comfort and happiness, by all the means in his power. He would have made any sacrifice to insure his father's gratification; but he was not always able to ascertain what would best insure it. He was often obliged to guess at it, and to follow that course which he thought most likely to bring about its fulfilment. Mr. Morton Worthington's jealousy of his own susceptibility encased him in a panoply of haughty reserve very difficult to penetrate. He had always bitterly resented in himself the only touch of softness in his nature—looking upon that which was, in truth, its redeeming quality, as its worst defect; and had, in consequence, striven perpetually to crush it into concealment, since he failed to eradicate it entirely. Feeling that he could not succeed in banishing affection and passion from his heart, he resolved to keep them pent there, apart from the suspicion of any human being—from that of their objects, above all. He fled from Henrietta Heathcote, and married another woman, that it might not be suspected how profound and incurable was the passion that had met with no return; and he lived with his son, in cold, untender distance, that Fermor might not perceive with how deep an affection he was beloved. Mr. Morton Worthington's was a curious pride of stoicism, engendering a perpetual living martyrdom—needless, as it was fruit

ness There was no end in it, but a senseless barren ambition to be superior, as it is called, to all weakness of feeling. He committed the mistake of not perceiving that out of some of human ity's weaknesses spring its best strengths. Hardness, inflexibility, cruelty, grow from unnaturally smothered weaknesses; while fortitude, forbearance, endurance, are the issue of their wise fostering. A tenderness spurned as unmanly folly, may—duly cherished—be turned to truest manliness.

"My dear fellow! I began to fancy we were never to see you here again!" was the exclamation with which 'Squire Heatcote received Fermor. "Why, we have been dull as a morass, without you, all this time. Here have I been longing to show you a new trolling-tackle I've had down from town. Fine weather for the pike; yet not a soul to enjoy a day's fishing with! I counted upon you, knowing you enjoyed the sport. But I guess how it is; like a good son, you've been unwilling to leave home while your father was unwell. And how is my good friend, Morton? Better, I trust?"

"My father is looking stronger and more cheerful this morning than I have seen him for some time past," answered Fermor. "He bade me, of his own accord, ride over and ask news of you."

"Hearty, thank ye! but plaguy moped. Out in the air all day, a man has no right to feel amiss; but, somehow, it makes the fresh air itself fresher and welcomer when we have a pleasant companion. There's my little girl, Kate, is the best companion in the world; I'd not exchange her against the cleverest talker that ever drew breath—no, not against the Speaker of the House of Parliament himself—when I can get her with me; but, egad! she's not always to be had, now. Those confounded studies! They were invented for the torment of sensible people, I do think. Since last I saw you, I don't believe we've had one rational morning together. Instead of spending the best hours out of doors, feeling the pure wind of Heaven upon us, Kate has been stiving in that rotten, old stupifying study, day after day, till I wonder she has any brains left—to say nothing of cheek-roses

Certainly, books are the pests of mankind ! This last week, Kate has been like a crazy girl for sticking to her lessons. I can't think what's come to her. She's gone out of her wits, I think ! But, I suppose, I ought to find it very wise, and very praiseworthy, instead of vexing at it," concluded the 'Squire, with his little sigh of resignation. "Of course, you'll think this, my dear fellow, who spoke up so rightly and so properly about letting nothing interfere with lesson-hours, and the rest of it, when you were last here ; but since then, there's no good to be got out of my little girl ; she keeps so deuced hard at it !"

"Not particularly 'since then,' uncle," said Kate ; "besides, I'm going to break myself of such bad habits ; I mean to give up regular hours, and regular lessons, and learn by fits and starts, by odd freaks and snatches, just when the humour seizes me. "You're right. Application is absurdity, and study is folly. Books are the bane of the world. No wonder, when such a heap of 'em (as Mrs. Lindon was telling me yesterday) was once found collected together, they took to lighting fires with 'em. Heating baths was a better deed than heating minds. Inflammable paper is useful ; inflammatory matter harmful ! For my part, I think the burning of the Alexandrian Library is one of the brightest acts history has to boast. It's a flaming record—among their other glorious exploits—of what soldiers achieve for the benefit of their race !"

At this moment Mrs. Lindon entered, to say that she was quite ready, when Kate liked to come and take her sketching-lesson.

"We are not going into the study this morning ; you and I are going to drive over to the village," said Kate. "You said I should want a new set of crayons ; we'll go and see if Chalkby has any of the kind you like ; if not, we can tell him to send to London for some."

"This afternoon will do for our drive as well, will it not ? There is a fine broad light, now, upon the old thorn tree we think of sketching in. Why not come at once ? The paper is stretched ready on the drawing-board, the pencils are cut and nicely

pointed ; the colours are prepared on the palette. Come, dear and look at them ; you'll feel tempted to begin, if you do."

"Then, I won't trust myself within temptation, but will make my escape at once," said Kate, flying away for her bonnet.

Mrs. Lindon silently followed her, and put on her own ; while the 'Squire laughed, and said to Fermor Worthington : "Come, my dear fellow ! let you and me away to the stream. Or, stay ; we'll give up our trolling for to-day, and we'll ride with Mrs. Lindon and Kate to the village. Thus, I secure two days' holiday ; for you shall come over soon, and we'll have a good long morning with the pike, while, to-day, we'll have a canter through the park. Or, what say you to giving your nag a rest, as he has already brought you from Worthington, and go with the womankind in the pony-chaise ? I shall be close beside it ; and we can have a pleasant chat all together. It'll be quite a gay party ; much more sociable than those hugger-mugger lessons. Quite a brilliant idea of Kate's, I think."

The 'Squire was in high spirits, talking and laughing incessantly, in his good-humoured, hearty fashion, as the little cavalcade rode on, in the order he had proposed. But they had not proceeded far, when one of his old friends and brother sportsman accosted him, saying he was come to fetch him over to his own place, to meet a party of choice spirits, who had suddenly promised to give him their company to dinner. The 'Squire could not resist this ; but, making the remark, that the only drawback he knew to pleasure was, that it was so apt to happen all at once, he took leave of them, and galloped off with his friend.

"I almost regret that you should have missed this fine forenoon for your drawing, Kate, love, so earnest as you seemed yesterday to begin the sketch," said Mrs. Lindon, as they drove on, "but I think I guess now why you insisted on coming out instead. I remember I owned I had a headache the first thing this morning, when you asked me what was the matter with me ; and you resolved to try what a drive through the fresh air might do for me. Thank you, dear ; but you should not have foregone your lesson for my sake."

"You give me credit for too much consideration," replied Kate. "I'm afraid I only thought of my own liking, when I determined to drive out, instead of staying at home to sketch."

"Candidly owning to a selfish motive, rather than take credit for an imputed better one, which you are conscious of not deserving, is almost better than original desert," said Mrs. Lindon. "And I can well forgive your forgetting that I had a headache, since I have one so frequently, that I hardly know myself when it begins and when it ends; whether it is another, or the same; whether it has come on to-day, or whether it is part of yesterday's. That is one advantage of a constant headache; you become accustomed to its presence."

"But not inured to the pain, surely? That must always be a renewed discomfort," said Fermor.

"It is wonderful how it becomes endurable, by dint of perpetuity," smiled Mrs. Lindon; "it teaches you to bear it patiently, and to do nearly as well with it as without it. You learn, under daily, hourly headache, to move, think, speak, bear noise, listen to practising, understand questions, return intelligible answers, and do all kinds of things, with a certain dulled sense of suffering, inconceivable to those who have a mere passing acquaintance with headache—temporary headache—headache now and then."

"At any rate, yours is the philosophy of headache," said Fermor. "Do you never try any remedy for it?" he added.

"Sometimes a little Eau de Cologne, applied to the temples, or smelling to pungent salts, relieves me for a short time," said Mrs. Lindon. "But I have left my smelling-bottle at home."

"Here it is," said Kate, producing it from her pocket.

"And yet you would have me believe you had no thought of my headache, in proposing this drive," said Mrs. Lindon, affectionately.

"I saw it lying on the toilet-table, and happened to put in my pocket, that's all," said Kate.

"Thinking I might want it," said Mrs. Lindon. "My dear

child, your making lightly of your attention, cannot make me the less sensible of it. The whole thing is just like you, Kate ; you are ever proving yourself kindlier-natured by your actions than by your words. To judge you merely by what you say—and by what you leave to be inferred of yourself, in what you say—would be doing you grievous injustice. I know you better than to take you on your representation. You make too modest an estimate."

"Should you not rather say, too unfair an estimate? Why should Kate be unfair to herself? She is guilty of an injustice against her own good qualities, when she lets her words show them less truly than her actions," said Fermor Worthington.

"I cannot smooth my words, to please any Iron Cousin in the world," she replied.

"You should make them accord with your gentler impulses, for the sake of your own consistency," he returned.

"Perhaps these gentler impulses only exist in your fancy," said Kate.

"Do you deny them?"

"I neither deny, nor admit them; I simply choose to speak according to my nature," she replied.

"And I ask no other than that you should," answered Fermor.

"Why should I make a parade of doing or feeling what is only commonly right?" said she.

"Without parading it, you might do it the justice of not hiding it, as if it were a thing to be ashamed of," he replied.

"Not to hide it, is to let it be seen; letting it be seen, is to show it; I like no such exhibitions," said Kate.

When they reached the village, they went at once to a shop of rather important pretensions, considering its obscure situation. It claimed affinity with the Fine Arts, on the strength of certain sheets of paper displayed in the window, bearing gaudily-coloured groups of flowers, intersected with minute cross-lines; a gilt frame or two; a small mirror, divided off into several minuter mirrors, which reflected twenty little likenesses of yourself in perplexing multiplicity, when you looked into it; a few skeins of Berlin

wools, in shades; some purse-silks; bunches of gilt and steel beads, with odds and ends of rings and tassels; and a seal or two, stitched upon a remarkably dingy card, engraved with several of the commonest Christian names. Among these well-known articles, which had lent their graces to adorn the shop-window for many a successive season, the party were surprised, as they approached, to see lying among them a very unusual addition, in the shape of a landscape-painting of considerable merit. It was a scene in Tuscany—one glow of rich colouring; the deep blue sky, the purple mountains, the vivid green of orange and vine, the sharp, well-defined outline of an arched bridge, that spanned a torrent in the distance, and of a rude stone water-mill, that stood on the right, in the foreground. An abrupt ejaculation from Mrs. Lindon, made Kate turn towards her. Her features were working in strong emotion; the lips quivered and the eyes were full.

After a few moments, she recovered herself a little; and said in a voice that she tried to steady: "Let us go in, and choose the crayons."

"While Kate was looking over the drawer which the master of the shop handed to her, she heard Mrs. Lindon ask him, where he had obtained that picture in the window, and whether it were for sale.

The man answered in the affirmative; and that he had taken it in part payment of a debt, when he was lately up in town, of a picture dealer who owed him money. That, under these circumstances, he should not mind parting with it cheap, if the lady felt disposed to become a purchaser.

"What is the price you would consent to take for it?" faltered Mrs. Lindon.

"Twenty guineas, madam."

"Twenty guineas!" was echoed in a faint, hopeless tone.

"If you are any judge of painting, ma'am—which I cannot doubt, since you have distinguished, with an artist's eye, the merit of the picture at once—you must perceive that I have named an extremely low sum—a mere song, in fact, for such a work of art as that. Perhaps you have not examined it—you have not re

marked what a masterly hand, what a true artistic feeling, is perceptible in this composition. It is worthy of one of our first masters; and had I told you it was a Stanfield, you might have believed me, without any compromise of your judgment. Allow me to take it out of the window for you, madam, that you may see it more closely—in a better light.”

“No, no; I thank you; no, no; I have seen it perfectly; it is not the——”

“I assure you, madam, the sum I have named is a mere nominal price for such a gem of art as that,” interrupted the voluble shopman. “Twenty guineas is an absolute ‘bagg-o-tell,’ for such a picture.”

“I know it; it is not that I think the price high—far from it; but that is a sum beyond my means. Thank you; pray attend to Miss Ireton. Kate, love, have you all that you require? Let me see what you have chosen.”



CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN the selection was completed, and they had left the shop, Mrs. Lindon leaned back quietly in one corner of the carriage, very silent, and very pale—but that she generally was.

Kate looked thoughtfully out of one of the windows, in deep pre-occupation; while Fermor Worthington said:—“You have not your salts, Mrs. Lindon, and I think your headache is troublesome. Where are they?”

“I must have left them behind me, on the counter, at Mr. Chalkby’s. How could I be so forgetful? A bad example for my pupil!” she said with her gentle smile.

“I will go back for them,” said Fermor, as he unfastened the carriage-door, and sprang out. “Drive on slowly, Martin,” said he to the coachman, “and I will overtake you.”

As Fermor Worthington disappeared, Kate turned abruptly

to Mrs. Lindon, and said : " You were interested in that picture ? What is it ? Whose was it ? Was it your husband's painting ? "

" It was one of William's last pictures, he painted it just before he —— " and Mrs. Lindon's words were checked by a low sob she could not restrain.

" I guessed,—I thought so ; it is a scene in Italy, is it not ? " said Kate.

" Yes,—a spot near Florence,—a view from our window,—the 'campagna' where we lodged,—a humble, but most beautiful place,—that window, where we so often—— " again Mrs. Lindon's voice failed her.

Kate, unobservant of this in her eagerness, was proceeding with farther questions, heedless of the pain she was giving, when Fermor, running up with the smelling-bottle in his hand, put an end to her speech ; and they went on for some time in their former order,—Kate looking from the window on her side, lost in thought ; Mrs. Lindon, sunk back in her corner ; and Fermor Worthington, keeping silence because the others were so still.

Presently, the carriage began to ascend a long, steep rise, which lay just out of the village, along the road to Heatcote Hall.

" I shall walk up the hill," said Kate to Mrs. Lindon, " while the carriage crawls slowly on." She was in the habit of doing this whenever they came that road ; so her governess only quietly bowed her head, and Kate jumped out.

" I'll come with you," said Fermor.

" No, no," she said peremptorily ; " I had rather walk by myself."

Fermor Worthington remained for a time sitting silently opposite to Mrs. Lindon, whom the heat of the day, the previous excitement, and her intense headache, combined to overcome. She sat perfectly motionless ; her wan, white face gleaming through her crape veil ; her hands lying loosely clasped on her lap ; her head slightly bent and drooping ; in a sort of resigned stupor.

He glanced at her with a compassionate eye as he drew the head of the carriage forward, so as to screen her from the sun ;

and then he looked forth in search of Kate. She was nowhere within sight. He stretched as far from the carriage side as he could, to obtain a far reach of view behind; but no Kate Ireton was to be seen. Without disturbing Mrs. Lindon, he softly let himself out of the carriage, and walked rapidly down hill. He went as far as the entrance of the village, and yet no Kate. He paused here; but after a moment's indecision, walked on again.

As he approached Mr. Chalkby's he caught a glimpse of Kate Ireton's white frock, just about to enter the shop. He hastened after her; when she, perceiving him, turned abruptly upon her steps, and exclaimed, "You here! I thought I told you I had rather walk by myself."

"Yes, but I wished to walk with you. When I found you were not coming after the carriage, I came to seek you. It is not well for you to be seen walking alone."

"And why not, pray?"

"A young lady—unattended—no companion—no servant; it is not usual, not seemly."

"I care little for appearances; people may think what they please of me; it does not put me out."

"But it is probable they may think more unfavourably of your uncle than of you, for letting you go out unattended."

"Oh! of uncle; that's another matter. I should not choose him to suffer in any one's opinion on account of what I do. But as for people judging me harshly, I care not one straw; they are welcome to their own notions, as far as I'm concerned. So long as I know I'm not doing wrong myself, it matters not an atom what they think. Besides, I don't believe they trouble themselves to think about me at all. It is not every idler who busies himself with coming, spying, and prying after me, to see what I am doing when I walk by myself."

Fermor smiled his quiet smile. "You are displeased with me because you think I come to try and find out what you returned for. You are wrong. I came simply to see what had become of you, when I found you missing. But since you have half owned that there is something to find out, let me know it."

"And so acknowledge the iron cousin's right to rule me?" said Kate, with her arch look.

"Not to rule you; but to share your secrets, and help you in them, if I can. I saw you were going into Chalkby's shop when I overtook you; I fancy there is something which you have a mind to purchase. Tell me what it is. Perhaps something that comes to more than you have in your purse; if so, let the cousin's help out yours."

"Oh, it is not money that's the difficulty," said Kate, with a frank laugh; "though you are very good to offer it to me. Had I needed it, I perhaps might not have refused, for if you wanted some, I should be very glad to give you mine; relations need not be particular which it is that helps the other in such matters. Money is not the point in question; my uncle gave me a twenty pound note the other day to buy a new habit, and I have some pocket-money besides, so I am rich."

"Well, then, what is the point in question?" asked Fermor.

"See how the iron cousin keeps me to the point! And sticks to his as if it were a loadstone!" exclaimed Kate. "A point to gain has irresistible attraction for him! It possesses more than magnet influence!"

"I confess it," smiled Fermor. "A point gained with you is indeed a triumph."

"Then don't triumph too much, when I tell you, that since you are so far in my secret, I consent you shall know it entirely. I have found out that Mrs. Lindon is very anxious to possess that picture in Mr. Chalkby's shop-window; it was painted by her dead husband—in Italy—where they were very happy together. I came back to secure it for her."

Fermor Worthington looked very much pleased. "Do you know its price?" he said.

"Yes, twenty guineas; I overheard Mr. Chalkby tell Mrs. Lindon so, when she asked him in a low voice what sum he wanted for it. She longed to buy it, I saw; but she said she could not afford it. Now, I knew that luckily I could, for I have just that sum."

"By giving up your new riding-habit?" said Fermor.

"By doing well enough without it," she answered; "my old one is not too shabby to wear; it will serve me for a long time yet. Come, let us go and make our purchase."

"Yours you mean; you will not let me have any share in it; you refused the help of my purse, you know," said Fermor.

"Perhaps I may still ask you for help—though not money-help," she replied, as they entered the shop.

The picture was soon bought, and ordered to be sent up to Heathcote Hall that afternoon; and then the two young people hurried away to overtake the carriage as speedily as might be. Fortunately they knew the hill was a long one, and that the 'Squire's horses generally took it quite leisurely, so they had not much fear that Mrs. Lindon would miss them before they could rejoin her.

"We never told Chalkby how to address the case," said Kate Ireton, suddenly, as they walked on. "It ought to have been directed to Mrs. Lindon."

"No matter, it will be addressed to you, Kate; you can give orders to have it taken to your own room, and then you can present it how and when you please," said Fermor.

"I do not mean to present it," replied Kate.

"Not present it? I thought you bought it expressly for the purpose," said Fermor.

"I bought it that Mrs. Lindon might possess it, not that I might give it," said Kate; "that is what I want you to help me in. I want you to give it to her as your gift."

"As mine, Kate, when it is yours? Do you think I would consent to such a thing?" said Fermor.

"You must consent to it, or you refuse me the help you offered me,—promised me," she said, decisively.

"I promised no such help as that," he returned.

"You offered money-help, which I didn't want; but you also said you would assist me in what I was about; that that was why you wished to know my secret—that you might help me," she said, pointedly.

"If I could," he rejoined, with as marked an emphasis.

"And you can," she replied, eagerly. "What is to hinder you from doing as I wish you—as I ask you?"

"I cannot tell or act a lie even to oblige Kate Ireton, and much pain as it gives me to deny her anything she asks or wishes," said he, firmly.

"So much for the iron cousin's aid!" she said, with a short laugh; "he's hard as adamant in refusal, but no stabler than water to rely upon."

Fermor looked extremely grave. "You are wrong, and you know it, Kate, to taunt me with failing you in such a point as this. You know you ought not to have asked it of me."

"Knowing the iron cousin's unyieldingness, perhaps I ought not," she said.

"Knowing his hatred of deception, you ought not," he returned.

"I hate deception as much as you can do," she retorted.

"Then why ask me to join you in carrying on one? There must be a falsehood told, and persevered in; feints devised and sustained; and all for what?"

"Because I do not like to give this picture to Mrs. Lindon as my present—as my purchase. It seems like reminding her that I have more money at my command than she has; that the pupil is richer than the governess; that a young girl has more power than a grown woman. It is almost an impertinence as a gift from me to her; whereas, if you presented it to her, there would be no difficulty,—no indelicacy."

"Use your own good sense, Kate, and you will perceive that there is no indelicacy at all in the case. There is only false delicacy in what you have urged. Mrs. Lindon knows that your uncle's indulgence furnishes you with more money than she possesses; this is a simple fact, reflecting credit or discredit upon neither you nor her. That you are willing to part with some of it to procure her a gratification, evinces a generous feeling, which can but add to her pleasure, instead of mortifying her."

"But that is the very thing I don't like,—appearing to lay claim to generosity of feeling, when, for my part, I can see no generosity in making presents with uncle's money."

"True; but this is your own; he gave it to you for a specific purpose,—to procure you an object you wanted. This you give up, that you may obtain for Mrs. Lindon something upon which she has set her heart. Why deprive her of the pleasure of knowing this?"

"I detest a display of kindness,—all the fuss and ostentation of making a present," said Kate; "I wonder how I came to think of making one. After all, it's very awkward and ridiculous,—the having to make a pretty speech, and seeming to expect to be thanked, and so on. I think I shall put the picture in her room, and let her find it, and say nothing about it."

"That would be—considering your own feelings instead of hers—sparing yourself some momentary perplexity which exists only in idea. Let the same generous impulse which caused you to buy the picture, be in your words and manner at the time you present it, and there will be no difficulty,—no awkwardness."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Kate, "all would be avoided if you'd only do as I wish you."

"You cannot really wish me to do what I have shown you would be wrong," replied Fermor.

"Then I wish I had never bought this picture!" she cried, hastily; "it is a vexation altogether."

"Do not repent a good feeling because you now happen to be under the influence of a bad one,—a weak one," said Fermor.

"The iron counsel of the iron cousin!" she said, as they came up with the carriage. He would have assisted her in; but she opened the door herself, and took her seat by Mrs. Lindon's side, exclusively addressing her conversation to her until they reached home.

When they arrived at the Hall, Mrs. Lindon asked Fermor if he would stay and dine there, as he usually did, when he came over; but he declined, on the score of his father's having said he should expect him home to dinner.

"And we expect you to dine here," said Kate, "so you will stay."

"I cannot; I told you my father expressly said he should wait dinner for me," Fermor replied.

"And you would rather dine with him than with us?" persisted Kate.

"I would rather his wishes should be fulfilled than my own," was Fermor's answer.

"Adroitly turned!" she exclaimed. "However, I shall not press you."

"I need no pressing, I should be only too glad if I could stay, but I cannot. I cannot disappoint my father, or keep him waiting."

"Pray do not keep him waiting one moment on our account," said Kate, turning, with a provoking air and curtsy, towards the door.

Fermor smiled, and yet looked a little pained too.

He returned, and shook hands with her. Then he said, with a brightened expression, "Perhaps you will ride home part of the way with me, Kate? I'll tell them to let Ben Dimble know he is to bring round your pony and attend you on horse-back."

"Do no such thing, if you please. I shall be busy this afternoon, and cannot ride."

"Kate is going to be very assiduous, and make up for this morning's lost time," said Mrs. Lindon. "There will still be several hours' good light for our sketch."

"Do not answer for me too soon," said her pupil; "I am not inclined to sketch,—I am not going to set to work at lessons. I shall take a long walk with my Mattykin; it's an age since she and I have had one together."

"And you will not ride with me?" said Fermor.

"I should be only too glad if I could, but I cannot," as you say," she replied, with a laugh, and a repetition of her saucy curtsy.

Fermor Worthington walked as far as the room-door; there

he paused, turned and said, "Good bye, Mrs. Lindon. Good bye Kate."

"Good bye," she returned.

He went out. She heard him cross the Hall, then stand for a moment upon the steps at the entrance before he got on horse-back. In another moment she knew he would be mounted, and in sight of the window, towards which he had the habit of looking up, to exchange a farewell nod with her and her uncle, who used to stand there together to see him depart whenever he left them.

Kate had remained on the spot where Fermor had left her ; but now she suddenly drew back a few paces from her vicinity to the window.

"These crayons are better than those we had last," observed Mrs. Lindon, who was engaged in unfastening the packet she had brought with her.

But Kate did not hear her. All at once, the young girl darted out of the room, sped up the great staircase, which led from the centre of the fine old hall ; and ran into one of the upper rooms, from the window of which there was an extensive view down the avenue and across the park.

She stood at that window for a considerable space of time, looking out earnestly ; until at length, the intervening trees shutting out from her ken the object that she was pursuing with her eyes, she slowly walked to her own room, and arranged her dress by the time the dinner-bell should ring.

Before this sounded, however, a servant came to tell her that a packing-case, addressed in her name, had arrived, and awaited her orders.

"Bring it here, Robert," she replied.

The man brought up the case and left the room, having, by her direction, unfastened the screws that closed it.

The picture was not too large or too heavy for Kate to lift ; and she took it out of the case, intending to carry it straight into Mrs. Lindon's room, and leave it there, as she had said she would. But she stopped, set it down, and stood looking at it

thoughtfully, as these ideas passed through her mind. "It is true, it would spoil the grace of the present, were I to put it there, without a word, without asking her to accept it. Why should I not overcome this silly awkwardness, this bashful nonsense? It is so; he was right; it is mere selfishness; it is studying my own feelings instead of hers, to shrink from saying a few kind words, because I find them embarrassing to speak. I will try—I will do it."

Kate put the picture back into the case, and went quietly down into the dining-parlour, where she found Mrs. Lindon sitting in an easy chair, with her back to the light. But the gentle governess immediately sat up, and began speaking cheerfully to her pupil of their pleasant drive, of the 'Squire's visit, of when they might expect to see him, and of the expediency of sending a groom to attend him home, as he would probably return after nightfall.

"Don't talk; I know you have a bad headache, and yet you are exerting yourself to entertain and amuse me, because uncle is away," said Kate.

"Why should I let my headache interfere with your comfort, dear?" said Mrs. Lindon. "I must not be dull if I can help it; it would be very hard upon you, if I were to condemn you to silence, because I feel inclined to be silent myself. It is part of your happy age to be full of remark, of question, of lively prate of all kinds: why should I be so selfish as to repress your very natural inclination to talk, whenever I happen to have a stupifying headache. I ought rather to watch lest I become taciturn and frumpish, and an unfit companion for a girl of your years, than seek to discourage in you what is not only harmless, but profitable. It is an instinct in youth to be talkative and inquiring; which impels them to seek information, to argue upon it, and gather fresh ideas from others, and to develop their own. A reasonable degree of loquacity in young people is not only to be tolerated, but to be encouraged, as a healthful exercise both physical and mental."

"But loquacity is not wholesome for a headache; therefore

while yours lasts, I hope you will not talk," said Kate. "Drink this cool wine-and-water—it will do you good after your drive in the heat of the sun; and then lean back in your chair, and don't speak another word to me till dinner is served." Mrs. Lindon smiled gratefully at Kate, as the young girl placed cushions beneath her head, drew down the blind near her, making these arrangements, and issuing these orders for her comfort, with an air of playful despotism.

"The eating has done me good; this nice simple roast mutton and bread has quite taken my headache away," said Mrs. Lindon, when they had nearly dined. "I fancy I fasted a little too long, under the idea of curing it; when, on the contrary, I should have eaten a bit of crust or a biscuit. I shall be wiser another time. And now that the pain has lessened, we will have some gossip together, dear Kate. Tell me what you think of that book I was reading to you yesterday evening, while we were sitting under the tree by the brook-side; or chat to me of any thing you will; only let me hear your pleasant voice, dear. A shame to have doomed it to be mute so long!"

"Now, as you are really able to talk, and to hear me talk," said Kate, "I will tell you that I have a favour to ask you."

"A favour, my dear child! I shall be only too delighted to grant it!" exclaimed Mrs. Lindon.

"I hope you will be delighted by granting this," said Kate, colouring, and laughing.

"What do you mean, Kate, love?" said her governess, surprised by her unusual manner—a mixture of shyness and pleased agitation.

Her look was generally a frank, unabashed, open regard,—quite as modest and unbold an expression as her present one; but just that clearness and transparency of countenance which belongs to innocence of heart, and a youth that has known neither check nor care. Now, there was a flush upon her face, very becoming, too, in its evidence of feeling.

"If you will come up into my room with me, I will show you, —I will tell you," she replied

"I am quite ready to go with you now, dear; if you have finished dinner, I have," said Mrs. Lindon.

"No hurry—that is—yes; let us go at once," returned Kate, getting up from her seat, and walking with a mingled air of consciousness and determination out of the room.

Mrs. Lindon followed her, wondering what this could mean. As they entered Kate's apartment, she went straight to the packing-case, drew away the lid, and said, "You wished to have this picture. I hope you will let me give it to you; it is yours. The favour I had to ask you is this,—that you will accept it, and not thank me."

Mrs. Lindon was overpowered. She trembled violently, and broke into a flood of tears. "My dear child! my dear kind child!" was all she could for some moments command voice to utter.

"I am going to leave you to yourself, that you may have the luxury of looking at your picture without having any one to look at you," said Kate. "Here, lie down upon my bed; I'll just draw the curtains between you and the air from the open window, and then you'll be cool and shaded, while there will be good light upon your treasure. Meantime, I shall go and have my ramble with Matty."

CHAPTER XIV.

"PROUD and nappy is your poor old Matty, my darling Miss Kate, to have you calling her to come and take a walk with you, once again. Ah well, well, it 'minds me of old times, when we used to go streaming about, through the copses and dingles, a blackberrying, or a Maying, or a nutting, or a vi'let hunting, you and me together; you in my arms, and me on my legs—very happy, wasn't we? And what a dear little rogue you was, with your 'Carry me, carry me!' for ever. You knew, fast enough says you, carrying was easier than walking—for them as is car-

ried, leastways—and nothing 'd serve you, bless you, but carried you must be. A sad rumbustical tyrant you was, surely; blessings on you!" said the nurse, fondly.

"And I am going to be just as tyrannical as ever this evening, Mattykin, just to make it seem to you exactly like the happy old times together. I'm going to make you tell me all the old tales you can think of; as you used to do, you know, when we rambled out together," said Kate.

"Sure, Miss Kate, my darling! What shall it be? Puss in Boots, Jack and the Bean-stalk, the White Cat, or Cinderella?"

"No, none of those, Mattykin," replied Kate, laughing; "but some of your old-world stories, that I like so well to hear. Of the proud, cold Worthingtons; of the stately lady-mother; of the gay, hard father; of the haughty, reserved, scholarly son; of his sudden marriage; of the blue-eyed little girl, the first Fermor Worthington; and of — but no, you knew nothing of him; he was born abroad, and when he was brought to England by his mother, and stayed a month at Worthington, you were away, with mine."

"Ah, you're talking of the present Fermor—the boy—the heir," said Matty. "He's a fine young gentleman, I hear; I see little of him, and I knew nothing of him, when he was a baby. I can tell you nothing about his younger days; they were all spent in foreign parts, more's the pity."

"Not all," replied Kate. "He spent a month in his English home; and that little month seems to have made more impression upon him in some things—in tastes, and likings, and home fancies and feelings and attachments—than all the rest of his life. I rarely hear him mention anything that happened, or any place that he stayed at, abroad; but of his childish visit to Worthington Court, he always talks with delight. It is the only thing that moves him to speak warmly, and out of his usual quiet, grave way. Fermor Worthington is thoroughly English in his manners and likings; and though he had still his foreign dress, when he first came over here, yet he is now as complete an Eng-

lish lad in his appearance, as in everything else. I shouldn't have let him claim the relationship between us, if he hadn't been true English—in heart, in look, in speech—as he is by descent. The Worthingtons are a fine old English family, and he is worthy of being their representative. He looks an Englishman, every inch of him ; and therefore he's welcome to call me cousin, and I don't mind calling him so. But Matty," said Kate, suddenly interrupting herself, "stop a moment ; I mustn't forget to give uncle's old favourite what I brought for it."

She stepped, as she spoke, to the gate of a paddock, in which grazed a bay mare, that had once been a magnificent hunter ; now past service, and permitted to enjoy its old age in luxury and ease. It was cropping its evening meal of clover ; but at the sound of Kate's voice, it came neighing and sidling up, to receive the morsel of sugar, or some such delicacy, from her hand.

As she patted its sleek, intelligent head, she turned to Matty, and said : "I have often intended to ask you—you who know all the secrets and legends of our house—how it comes that this creature, of all uncle's horses, has no name. I have never heard it called anything but 'the bay mare ;' while all the rest have their especial titles. Once, when uncle was caressing it, I was going to ask him to tell me ; but there was something in his face that made me break off, when I had just put my question. I thought, perhaps, it had been called after my mother."

"No, not after Miss Hetty, but after——. You asked me for an old tale just now, Miss Kate, my darling. This is one, There is an old story about this bay mare."

"I thought so ! Tell it me," said Kate, eagerly.

"You must know," began Matty, setting her back against the bole of one of the nearest trees, while her young mistress stood fondling the old horse, "you must know that once upon a time, this mare was the finest animal in all master's stud. Its coat was bright and shining as a looking-glass, its eyes were clear as crystal, it was fleet as an arrow, yet as easy as a boat on a lake. It was a birthday present from his mother to Mr. Harry,

and very proud and fond of it he was, to be sure. Well, he had only just had it, and was casting about for a name for it—for he'd given his mother's name a'ready to another of his hunters—when there came into this part of the country a family of the name of Damer—very high, but very poor—as the story went. It was said that they were related to Dukes; or that they had an Earl or a Marquis in the family, or perhaps even a barrow-knight, for aught I know. Certain it is, however, that there was very high blood in the family, and they held their heads very high, according; and moreover, their only daughter was called the honourable Miss Damer—the honourable Laura—as many named her. A pretty, clever, dashing young creature she was, to be sure! Such a figure for horseback, or for an archery-meeting, or an assize ball, or the harp, which she played like any King David, so beautiful, she did! Well, our Mr. Harry met Miss Damer at a many of these places; and then he called his bay mare 'the honourable Laura,' and we servants could all guess how it was with Mr. Harry's heart. He was joked a deal about it, by his young friends and neighbours—the young gentlemen that rode out hunting and shooting with him. But he used to laugh it off, and say she was too good for him, too high for him, too clever for him; for our Mr. Harry was always modest; and the honourable Laura, besides being a nobility lady, born and bred, was such a one at her books, and her drawing, and her music! Well, one day—Mr. Harry had been all night, over-night, with Miss Damer, at our county ball; and Betty Blowze, the barmaid at the Star Inn at Dingleton, where the large assembly-room is, and where the county balls was always held, told me that our young 'Squire was the honourable Laura's partner best part of the time—what should I notice but master (my young master, as he then was) dressed out very nice and neat the first thing in the morning, no boots and spurs, no hunting-coat, but a dark suit fit for an evening, and standing in the hall, humming a tune, with his riding-whip in his hand, waiting for his horse to be brought round. I noticed, too, that he'd got a flower—not a common flower, but one of the 'azoticks' out of

Missus's 'caservatry'—in the buttonhole of his coat; and his eyes were bright and dancing, and his mouth very pleasant-looking; and when I dropped him a curtsey, he smiled and nodded at me, and said: 'Is that you, Martha?' quite in a joyful tone, as if he was glad to see me—though there was nothing to be glad at, but his own thoughts. Well, I asked him, if the old 'Squire, his father, or Madam, his mother, enquired for him, where I was to say he was gone; but he made as if he didn't hear me, and turned away, and went on humming his tune, and winding the lash of his whip round and round his fingers. I stood loitering about till the horses were brought to the hall-door, that I might hear if anything was said that should let me know farther, for I began to be curious."

"You often are curious, Mattykin," said Kate, laughing "it's a failing of yours, isn't it?"

"To be sure, Miss Kate, my darling; how should I have picked up so many odd stories to amuse you with, if I hadn't made it my business to find out all about 'em, and learn the rights of 'em?"

"True; go on with your present one," laughed Kate.

"Well, there stood Dick Dimble—that was Ben's father, you know, Miss Kate, he was groom then—with the saddle-horses, one of which was this very bay mare, the honourable Laura. 'Have a care how you urge her too hard this morning, Mr. Harry, sir, says Dick; 'she's full of corn, and is rather spirity, and up to all manner of tricks, to-day.' 'Never mind, Dick,' says master 'a little spirit's not amiss! She's a beautiful creature! Faint heart never won fair lady!' And he leaned down and patted the creature's neck, and spoke whispering words, and hummed his tune again. Well, they rode away, and I saw no more of master or groom, till the evening; when, as I was crossing the court-yard, on my way to the laundry, who should I see but Dick Dimble leaning against the door-post of the stables, rubbing up his harness, and whistling, and wish-whish-whishing between whiles. I went up to him, and fell into talk with him. 'I s'pose young master was away after the hounds to-day, as usual, Dick,' says I,

though I knew well enough he was no such thing, without his scarlet coat and all! 'Well,' says Dick, 'Mrs. Martha, you're a faithful servant and know how to hear, and see, and say nothing I'll tell you what it is; it's my 'pinion, that young master has been what you may call thrown this morning; and what's more, I think it's a crying shame, that any honourable Miss Laura of them all should dare to fling out, and toss up their heads at such a prince of a fellow as our young 'Squire is; or find it in their heart to break his, let 'em be as handsome and as clever as they please.' 'What do you mean, Dick?' I says. 'Why this, Mrs. Martha,' says he. 'Didn't you see how lively our Mr. Harry looked this morning, when you stood at the hall-door, and saw him mount his horse and ride away, with me following behind him? It was just the same, all the way. He chatted with me about how the horses all were, and how the crops looked, and how the season promised for hunting, and a lot of things, just to be saying something pleasant and good-humoured, and like himself—though every now and then he seemed hardly able to speak for singing, and to be thinking of anything else but what he was talking about; till we came near to Woodside—the cottage, you know, Mrs. Martha, that the Damers have taken, since they came to stay hereabouts.' 'I know,' says I. 'Well,' he says, 'when we came nigh to the palings that enclose the Woodside grounds, I see Mr. Harry begin to fidget, and shy, and fall off his talk, and slacken rein, and try all he could to distance the time of arriving at the gate; and as for singing, he didn't seem to have a note in his voice, but only now and then gave a hem, as if his throat was full o' chopped hay, and he'd a' been glad of a pull at some cool ale, or even a drink of good well-water, had there been any at hand. I took no notice, o' course; but just as the servant came to the gate, and said yes, Miss Damer was at home, and there was no going back, I said to master, as he dismounted, Give me the bridle, Mr. Harry, sir, I'll hold honourable Laura fast; she shan't bolt. I'm not afeard on her. As you say, faint heart never won fair lady! I could see his face brighten a bit at that, as he turned from me, and went into the house. Two mortal hours I waited outside that gate,

Mrs. Martha—luckily, there was shade, or the honourable Laura (the mare, I mean) might ha' kicked at standing so long in the heat—two mortal hours! At last, out come master. But such a changed man! you'd hardly have known him, Mrs. Martha, had you set eyes on him at that moment. He was as white as any ghost, and walked as bent as an old man, and as unsteady as a drunken one. He said no word; but went straight up to his horse, made two attempts to put his foot in the stirrup, before he could hit it—such a horseman as he is!—flung himself into the saddle and rode off. He kept up a pace like the wind, all the way home: and when we came to the Hall, tossed me the rein, threw himself off his horse, and went straight in-doors, without so much as a word, or a look, towards me or the mare; him, too, that always has a kind speech, or a nod, or a slap on the shoulder, either for me or the horses. Don't tell me, Mrs. Martha; I'd take you any bet, the honourable Laura (I mean Miss Damer) has played him a jade's trick. As sure as you're alive, Mr. Harry has been clean pitched over—what d'ye call it—refused."

"I think Dick was right," resumed Matty, after the pause of a moment; "for, for some time after, Mr. Harry was quite unlike himself. He would fold his arms, and stand looking out of the window, by the quarter of an hour together; he took no thought about his food; answered his father and mother, as if he didn't know what they were saying to him; cared nothing for his usual sports, his hunting, and fishing, and shooting; stopped idling in-doors; never rode out at all; was always asking what o'clock it was, and wondering it was still so early; seemed glad when bed-time came; got up late, yet looked tired the first thing in the morning; neglected his dress, and let his hair hang loose about his ears. Once, I remember, I happened to be dusting in the library—one of the house-maids asked me to do it for her, while she stepped down to the lodge to see her mother for half an hour who was sick of an ague—when I saw Mr. Harry come softly in, and close the door behind him, as if he didn't wish to be seen. To humour him, I staid where I was, behind the screen, that he mightn't think he was being watched or observed."

"To save him from knowing it, you did it?" said Kate.

"Yes," said Matty, "I didn't want him to be teased, by finding that some one was there, when he fancied himself alone. Well, he walked up to the great map, that hangs on one side of the room, against the wall, and stood looking at it for some time, with his hands in his pockets, and his mouth looking as if he were whistling, without sound, to himself. At last he gave a deep sigh, and turned away. Then he stood, for a bit, in the bow-window, where the two big globes stand; and these he spun round, one after the other, looking dizzily at them, as they twirled and twirled beneath his right forefinger, while with his left he pulled his nether lip, till it left his teeth as bare as the globes themselves. 'I can't make end nor side of them,' I heard him mutter; 'I shall continue a blockhead all the days of my life.' And then he gave another sigh, and turned away. He remained opposite one of the book-shelves for several minutes, and stared at the backs of the books, as if he was making out what was wrote on 'em; but I don't think he was reading, either; nor yet, when he took down one, and turned over its leaves, letting them spring from his thumb so fast, that it wasn't likely he could make out the lines and letters, though he was looking at them all the time. I heard him say, between his teeth: 'And these cursed books, that she's so fond of! How shall I ever get any one of 'em into my head—much less all! I shall never be other than the dolt I have been all my life! I couldn't be worthy of her—try as I might! No wonder she despises me! No wonder she has made her choice elsewhere.' He flung the book away, and clasped both hands before his face, and stood so, quite silent, for a long time; at least, it seemed a very long time, I know, to me, for I was afraid to stir or breathe, lest he might see or hear me, so still the place was, and so still he remained. You might have heard a pin drop. At last, there was a knock, and the handle of the door was gently turned. Mr. Harry started. 'Who's there?' he cried, gruffly enough. 'It's I, 'Squire,' said Dick Dimble, putting his shock head softly into the room. 'I've seen your honour prowling about this place lately, more than is

good for you. No good comes of haunting and burrowing in libraries and studies, when it isn't nat'ral to a man; if he's born and bred a book-worm, well and good—he can't help his natur', no more than a ferret, or a rat, or a mole, or any other vermin can; but when it's the natur' of him to be abroad, and scouring over the country like a stag, or a dog, or a horse, or such kind o' noble animal, that knows what life is, why then he oughtn't to skulk in holes and corners, but he should come out, and enjoy what God gave him to enjoy, and taught him to enjoy, and made him fit to enjoy. You must come out and ride, Mr. Harry, sir; 'sense my saying so, but you must,' says Dick. 'I can't ride,' says master, in a broken voice, 'I shall never care to ride again.' 'Don't say so, Mr. Harry, sir,' says Dick. 'Take heart, sir, and try what a good gallop 'cross country'll do for you. It'll make a man of you once more. Do be persuaded; I've brought round the horses, Mr. Harry, sir; do come and have a good brisk ride.' The 'Squire turned away, and began spinning one of the globes again; and then he said—not looking at Dick while he spoke—'What horse have you brought for me, Dick?' 'The bay mare sir,' says Dick, very firm and steady like. The 'Squire glanced up quite sudden, and looked straight in Dick's face. Then he walked up to him, put one hand on his shoulder, and with the other gave Dick's a hearty grip, while he passed on out of the study, saying:—'I'll go—I will ride.' And ever since that time," concluded Matty, stepping forward, and patting the old hunter's neck, "it has always been called 'the bay mare.'"

"And what became of its namesake, the honourable Laura Damer?" asked Kate.

"Soon after that, the family went up to town; and we heard afterwards, that the young lady had married a Colonel Lascelles, and had gone out with him to India," answered Matty. "But Mr. Harry had taken to his riding and hunting, and they made him his own man again, as Dick Dimble said they would."

CHAPTER XV.

‘AND so, master and you have made out the cousinship between you and the folks at Worthington Court?’ said Matty, as she and her young mistress rambled on again. There was always a good deal of neighbourliness, and kith-and-kin feeling, between our people and theirs in the old times. My Madam Heathcote and Madam Worthington called one another by their Christian names; and there was always relation meeting and greeting between the two families at Christmas time, and on birth-days, and wedding-days, and such like. What do you think of the present folks, Miss Kate, my darling? What sort seems Mr. Morton Worthington, now he’s come to be head of the house? And what like’s his son, besides being English to the backbone—which I’m glad to hear?’

“Well, in some things they are like father, like son,” said Kate; “they come of the same proud race—they’re made of the same stern stuff—which, it seems, is the Worthington characteristic. For the son,—my iron cousin, as I call him,—he might by a miraculous chance be softened, or melted, bent or moulded, wrought upon by some means or other; but of the marble father, there’s no hope; under all conceivable changes, he would remain a hard, impenetrable, unalterable block of primitive granite. Nothing but hewing him piecemeal, or cutting at the very heart of him, would produce any effect upon marble Mr. Morton Worthington. As my mother proved, if all be true,” she added, in a little exultant under-tone.

“Ay, that she did, as I, and none so well as I, know for a certainty,” said Matty. “I once happened to see how unstonny Mr. Morton Worthington could look! Never but once—that once—did I see him carry himself like anything else but the cold, marble piece o’ goods he seemed—more like a statter, or a bust on legs, than a man.

"And that once——?" said Kate.

"Yes, that once, sure enough, he did show he was flesh and blood; a man with a heart in his bosom, and with fire in his heart—in his eyes—in his words."

"And you happened to see it?" pursued Kate, with her eyes fixed upon the nurse.

"Yes, I chanced to be hiding—that is, I chanced to be where I could see—could overhear him and my Miss Hetty together—when they little thought any one was by—and when he told her plain out he loved her, and that he begged her to have pity on him, and have him, for he couldn't live without her. And it was when she told him as plain, that she didn't and couldn't love him in return, that Mr. Morton showed he wasn't stone to the heart. I shall never forget his look—though he never knew I saw it—nor she neither, for I never mentioned that I'd chanced to—to——"

"You were right," said Kate. "Best speak of it no more."

After this evening ramble and conversation with her nurse Matty, whenever Kate went over to Worthington Court with her uncle, she felt more and more interested to watch the conduct and speech, and to observe every slight gesture and look of the cold, haughty master of the house. The interest his character possessed for her was not that of liking, or sympathy; but a sort of resistless attraction, which led her to speculate upon his inward thoughts and sentiments, as opposed to his outwardly expressed actions and words. She was continually drawn to contrast his external manner with what she had learned of his soul's history; and while she noted the chill, unmoved demeanour, would recall to herself that one fiery point in his life, of which she knew.

The feeling of Mr. Worthington towards her, partook of somewhat the same nature. He could not withstand the impression her image produced upon him. He felt it, even while he did not permit himself to look at her. He had a perpetual sense of Hetty's living impersonation being there, near him, before him; only unseen, because he would not allow himself directly to regard it. This was a negative effect she produced upon him; a more posi-

tive one, was the uneasiness which he felt at her perfect ease. The fearlessness of tone, the unembarrassed look, the unhesitating speech, all combined to discompose and annoy him. Her presence had too great an involuntary influence upon him, to be welcome or pleasant; and yet there was something in the beautiful, spirited girl, that could create neither aversion nor displeasure. There was a kind of mutual interest between the two, at once repellent and attractive, which would let them neither like nor dislike each other. Kate could not look upon him with indifference, when she remembered how passionately he had loved her mother; yet she could not help presenting his self-imposed stoicism of coldness and reserve; while Mr. Worthington felt constrained and conscious when she was present, and relieved when she was gone, without actually experiencing disapproval, or expressing objection.

He would sometimes speak slightly and depreciatingly of her to his son; but he never went beyond such remarks as he had once before made; generally treating her when absent, as when present, with a cold avoidance,—as if she were a subject and a person too insignificant to be noticed,—of too little consequence to be disparaged.

Kate, on her side, was not quite so forbearing. She did not scruple to show that she thought Mr. Worthington did not use her well; and that if not actively unkind towards her, at least he was unwarrantably disdainful and disregarding.

This was one of the most frequent topics of disagreement between herself and Fermor Worthington. She, ever hovering on the verge of something petulant and insolent in her allusions; he, never tolerating the slightest approach to disrespect or want of deference towards his father. She, perpetually trying how much he would bear; he, ever watchful to prevent and repress her saying anything which he felt bound not to allow. The more Kate Ireton felt Fermor Worthington's influence upon herself, the more did she strive to exercise one upon him; but so long as there was the least tincture of wrong in what she sought to sway him to, she could not flatter herself she produced the slightest effect.

Upon Kate's blunt mode of speech, her governess would sometimes gently attempt to remonstrate with her. "Indeed, my dear child," she would say, "you will never be loved, if you persist in that abrupt, disregarding manner."

"I don't want to be loved," Kate would answer, with a scornful laugh. "If people can't like me as I am—natural, outspoken, truth-telling—they may let it alone."

"You may be quite as truthful, with less roughness. It makes you appear unamiable. To hear you answer so bluffly, startles people from loving you as you deserve."

"I care not for such easily-startled liking. I don't seek their love; I want none of it."

"All human beings want love; it is humanity's first great necessity. If you do not wish for love, it is because you have never known its want. There will come a time when you will desire it, when you will need it."

"And till then, I'll manage to do without it," said Kate.

"Well for you to talk of doing without it, who possess it at present in such abundance, my dear child," said Mrs. Lindon, with a sigh and a smile. "All I would warn you against is, not recklessly to risk its loss or abatement. It is too priceless a blessing to be lightly thrown away, or even neglected. Treasure that you have; and disdain not fresh store. Impossible to be too covetous in its acquisition, or to hoard it too dearly and nearly. Affection is the only wealth of which you cannot be too great a miser."

It is probable that had Mrs. Lindon's mild words, together with the example of her gentle, unselfish disposition, continued, they might imperceptibly have wrought, in the course of the next few years, that chastening effect upon her pupil's character which would have softened it into perfection. But the young widow's health gave way; and just as the medical attendant had pronounced that a southern climate could alone save her, a small annuity bequeathed to her by a distant relation, enabled her to repair to her beloved Italy—to starve, as the 'Squire said, to luxuriate, as she thought—upon fifty pounds a year.

For some time, there was a talk of supplying Mrs Lindon's place with another instructress ; but time slipped by, and none was engaged. Kate insensibly fell into her old desultory habits : was constantly on horseback with her uncle ; took no thought of lessons, and pursued only his and her own pleasant devices for out-of-door enjoyment. Mr. Morton Worthington's precarious health and increasing exactions, caused his son to be less and less master of his own time ; so that Heathcote Hall and its inmates saw little or nothing of Fernor Worthington. Months succeeded one another, and years crept by, leaving little to mark their rapid progress. As Kate approached womanhood, she began to feel a certain monotony, a want of resource and interest in her existence,—the inevitable result of insufficient mental culture. She had the vigour of strong natural powers, which enabled her to express herself—even as a child—with remarkable capacity ; but now that she had attained an age when girlish pursuits could no longer suffice to satisfy her tastes, or occupy her faculties adequately, refinement, enlightenment, fresh ideas, became absolute necessities, which were each day more and more keenly felt. Once, she and the 'Squire had been taking a smart canter across the Oakleigh Downs, in order to counteract the depressing influence of the morning,—a chill, misty, drizzly day in early autumn. As they rode homewards, the hedges looked dank and soppy ; the park trees behung with a grey veil of haze and moisture ; the sky leaden and uniform ; the roads muddy ; the leaves dripping ; all seemed cheerless and blank.

"Uncle," said Kate, suddenly, "I wish you would take me to Italy. The blue skies, the glowing sunshine, the glorious starlight and moonlight, that they talk of, as perpetually reigning there in cloudless beauty, make me long to exchange this dreary prospect of a long, long autumn and winter, for a season there. Think of the paradise of such a climate, compared with this ! Ugh !" and she shuddered ; "to think of the many dull hopeless weeks and months we shall have to wade through, of this kind of weather, before spring comes to cheer us."

"You forget Christmas, Kate, with its yule logs, its holly

boughs, its rousing fires, its good fare, its jolly cheer, its merry dances, its songs, its games, its holiday dresses, its bright look, and frolic time. You forget we have that to look forward to, and to look back upon, between this and spring. You forgot our good old English Christmas ! ”

“ No, I remember it quite well—I remember it too well—I know it by heart ; I have seen so many English Christmases, that I should like to spend one Christmas away from England, just to know how one feels without beef and pudding being brought to table like a doom, on a particular day. Oh, that inevitable turkey and chine ! Those relentless mince pies ! I should excessively like to have a fête, instead of a fate, in my way of spending Christmas-day, if it were but for change of pastime.”

“ Like to have what, my dear ? ” said the 'Squire, simply.

“ Only a worthless play upon a word, uncle ; which was more over an unworthy affectation—for I have no right to use French words, knowing so few ; and besides, it should have been properly festa, not fête ; for it is an Italian holiday I am longing for ”

“ And you shall have one, Kate, my dear,” said her uncle. “ It would be hard if you should long in vain for any thing that I can give you. So, hey for Italy ! when shall we go ? ”

“ The sooner the better—to-morrow—the day after—when you will, uncle ! ” she exclaimed, gleefully. “ I'll brush up what little French and Italian dear patient Mrs. Lindon ever managed to coax into my pate. I can do that on the road, so as to lose no time ; and we'll go and see her herself, shall we ? Take her by surprise in her Tuscan hut, that she has so often written to us in ecstasies about, and hoped one day to show us. How surprised she will be ! And how pleased ! For though I fear I often tried her gentle temper more than I ought—I have felt this since I lost her—yet I believe she loved me.”

“ Who does not, you rogue ? ” said the 'Squire. “ And by-the-bye, as we are so soon to be off on our travels, we may as well call to-day in our way home, at Worthington Court, and bid

Morton and Fermor good-bye. They will be surprised, I take it, at such an unusual freak on our parts."

"Nothing surprises or disturbs the imperturbable Worthingtons—our grim, stately, marble and iron cousins!" laughed Kate. "You'll see, uncle; the father will look no more moved than if you were to announce that you were going home after your visit; and the son will perhaps say, 'You could not have decided on a wiser step, 'Squire; a winter abroad will do you both good. Kate will benefit by travel; and you will have change of scene and amusement. You are quite right to go.' The iron cousin always considers 'right' first."

"Fermor's a good lad!" said the 'Squire, heartily.

"Very good," said Kate, with a laugh.

"You say that, as if you didn't mean it quite in the way I do," said the 'Squire.

"I dare say not, uncle," she replied. "I mean, he's so good that he isn't satisfied unless every one matches his own goodness, and that's rather too good, when one sometimes feels inclined to be a little wicked."

"But I don't find Fermor too good, for my part; he's pleasant with his goodness—which all good people are not," said the 'Squire. "Don't you agree with me, my dear?"

"Quite, unclé,—that all good people are not pleasant," said Kate.

"And that Fermor is pleasant, although he's so good," continued her uncle.

"Well—yes; at any rate, it's pleasant to hear you say so," she returned, laughing.

CHAPTER XVI.

"WHAT think you my Kate and I have made up our minds to do, Morton?" said the 'Squire, after he had shaken hands with his friend, and inquired concerning his health; "we are talking of a trip to the continent—of wintering in Italy."

"Are you?" said Mr. Morton Worthington, in the calmest and evenest of tones.

Kate glanced at her uncle, with a merry twinkle in her eyes, to remind him of her prediction.

"Is it possible, 'Squire!" exclaimed Fermor. "Do you really think you shall like to leave England?"

An almost imperceptible twinge passed across the 'Squire's face; but he answered: "Yes; Kate has a notion she should like a winter abroad; so I am anxious to go. We shall probably start in a day or two."

"So soon!" said Fermor.

"If I am ever to make the grand tour, the sooner the better," laughed the 'Squire. "Many would think I've already put it off later than I ought to have done. But better late than never, as the old saying goes."

"And are you so eager for this foreign visit,—so eager to leave home, Kate?" said Fermor.

"Is there not, somewhere, a passage about home-keeping youths having homely wits?" she returned, gaily; "the same thing holds good, I conclude, for young damsels. It is high time somewhat should be done to prevent me from rusting, or must ing, by shutting up too long; so uncle is going to take me an airing that shall give me a little brightening and polishing."

"Too much exposure abroad sometimes dims a woman's real lustre, though it may give her a superficial brilliancy," said Fermor, in a lighter tone, like her own.

"Perhaps you would have her merely scrubbed neat and clean, and set on the kitchen shelf,—a domestic utensil?" said Kate. "You probably hold, that in her own housewife sphere alone, a woman should shine."

"I certainly think that it is there she shines to best advantage," said Fermor.

"And if a little foreign polish is first given, it enables her to settle down in her own home with all the more effect," said Kate.

"Well,—'polish,' merely; so that there be nothing artificial

nothing adventitious; so that the sterling native gold be allowed to appear in its intrinsic effulgence, and not have suffered lacquering," he answered. "Perhaps you are right; and that for women, as well as for men, youthful travel is an advantage. I spoke hastily. Doubtless, this proposed journey will profit you much. That will be a consolation for losing you and the 'Squire from England."

"You will not miss us much as neighbours, for you rarely come over to the Hall now," said the 'Squire, as he rose to take leave. "We shall hope to see you oftener when we return."

Fermor said nothing, but he grasped the 'Squire affectionately by the hand, and looked his gratitude.

"Fermor, suppose you put on your hat and accompany our friends on their way home," said Mr. Worthington. "As they are leaving England so soon, you may not **have** another opportunity of seeing them. Go; I wish it."

Fermor started with delight at this unexpected command; and hastened out to have his horse saddled, while the 'Squire and Kate were taking leave of his father.

He was more than usually grave and quiet, for some time, as they rode on, side by side; but at length rousing himself, he said:—"I am very selfish, to think only of my own regret, in having you leave us; I ought to remember that you will enjoy a great pleasure. How do you propose going? Which way?"

He discussed the route with the 'Squire and Kate; entered with animation into all the details of their journey; aiding them with all the hints and suggestions which might be of use to such inexperienced travellers, and which his own early residence on the continent enabled him to furnish.

"What a delightful thing it would be to go with you!" he exclaimed, in the midst of some minute description he was giving the 'Squire, of how he was to proceed in crossing the Alps.

"And what a still more delightful thing it would be to have

you with us !” exclaimed the 'Squire. “Do, my dear fellow ! Not to speak selfishly, you would be the making of us, in our difficulties ; and your company would double our pleasure. Wouldn't it, Kate ?”

Fermor glanced quickly at Kate. She didn't speak ; but her face wore a glowing, pleased expression, of undoubted assent.

“You are very good, 'Squire,” said Fermor, in his deep-breathed, earnest voice ; “there is nothing I should so intensely like ; but my father—I must not—I cannot leave him.”

“He's not a child, that he can't be left ! He won't tumble out of window, or fall into the fire, or break his neck down stairs, or get into mischief if he isn't watched, will he ?” said Kate, hastily.

“He likes to have me with him ; and I like to stay with him,” said Fermor, gravely.

“Even when we ask you to go with us ? Even when we tell you, you will be our greatest comfort and assistance ? Even when we tell you your company will double our pleasure ?” said Kate, turning her beautiful face full upon him, in the eagerness of her urging.

Fermor withdrew his look resolutely from the one which he felt deprived him of power to speak a denial ; and then he said, in a low, but firm tone : “Even then.”

“The Iron Cousin has no need to ‘screw his courage to the sticking-place !’” she said ; “it is ever fast and sturdy to the point of adherence.”

“Would you have it otherwise, when duty is the point of adherence ?” he returned. “I trust, courage and I may never be unable to cry, ‘We'll not fail,’ when duty makes the appeal against inclination.”

“Then your inclination is with us ?” she said.

“It is,” he replied ; “I hardly dare to think how entirely it is with you ; how much I should prefer going with you and your uncle, to staying at home. But I know my presence is required, and therefore I remain.”

"If you choose to sacrifice your own pleasure, do you think it right to diminish ours?" said Kate. "Remember, my uncle and I have told you that we shall enjoy our journey but half as well without you."

"You urge me too far, Kate," said Fermor. "You urge me to tell you that all other considerations should give way, with me, to that of my father. And even now, I am transgressing his commands," he added, with a sad smile, as he looked round. "He told me to accompany you on your way home; and here have I come almost to the very door of Heathcote Hall with you. To save the letter of his injunction, I must bid you farewell here, under the old avenue trees. They will wear their spring leaves ere we meet again; but you will have seen many a brave tree, and many a broad acre of land, before then; though none fairer and dearer than your own glorious park trees, 'Squire! I shall come and see them, now and then, while you are away, for your sake and Kate's. Good bye, 'Squire—a pleasant journey! Farewell, Kate!"

"Nonsense, my dear fellow! You are not going to take leave here; you must come in with us—you must dine with us—you must stay till evening. We can't spare you yet! We can't part with you yet! Remember, we are going away for a long time; and shan't see each other for months to come. Nonsense, you mustn't think of returning yet!"

"I fear I must, sir," said Fermor.

"Why tempt him from his beloved stern path of duty, uncle? He has so scrupulous a reverence for it that he thinks he ought to observe even its least reasonable exactions. He thinks himself bound to obey his father to the minutest shade of his imperious will. Not so much as a command to return by a stated quarter of an hour, will he infringe, to please friends who are foolish enough to let him see they wish to have him with them as long as they can."

"Indeed, I think you carry your implicit obedience to your father's commands too far, my dear fellow," said the 'Squire, "if you will allow me to say so."

"You would not say so, 'Squire, if you knew all. My father's health is more fragile than you think it; his very life seems to tremble in the balance. His physician has hinted as much to me; and that thwarting him may have the worst effects. I know him; I know he likes to be obeyed at a half word—at an implied one. I will never have to reproach myself that by omission, or even inadvertence of mine, his fate has been hastened. This makes me daily, hourly, nay, minutely, watchful of him. Now you will understand my scruples, and bid me farewell with entire forgiveness, and even approval."

"Thou'rt a good fellow, Fermor! a true good fellow!" exclaimed the 'Squire warmly, as he wrung his young friend's hand, and returned his farewell.

"Farewell, Kate!" said Fermor, leaning forward to shake hands with her, her uncle being between them.

But Kate rode round, till her horse was close beside his; and then she took his riding-whip from his hand, and said: "Let me have this; it will serve to remind me of the Iron Cousin's rod of rule. It shall go with me abroad, since he will not go himself."

"Give me yours in exchange," he said; "though I need nothing to make me remember the smart lash of Kate's words; they cut deep."

"If they have ever cut too keenly, or too sharply, forgive them," she said. "But iron need not flinch from the touch of a lady's riding-whip."

"A 'touch,' no! A touch shall ever be welcome!" said Fermor, as he seized her offered hand. "But sometimes, I think, it has amounted to a lacing, or a dressing, or some such extreme administration."

"And so, in revenge, you grip my poor fingers till they ache, that I may remember the Iron Cousin's clutch! I'll beware how I venture my hand within it again."

"When you return to Heathcote, I trust!" said Fermor. "God bless you, Kate; farewell! Farewell, dear friends both!"

And Fermor Worthington clapped spurs to his horse, and

galloped down the avenue, away from the old Hall, as if he would not allow himself to pause, or to look back.



CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. LINDON'S "Tuscan Hut" was a charming cottage and grounds; simple and unpretending, even to humbleness, but most picturesque—a true Italian 'campagna.' It was situated at some distance from Florence, in the Val d'Arno; not precisely on the banks of the river, but very little removed from its vicinity. The road which led from her dwelling straight to the beautiful city, lay along the shores of the Arno; the stream flanked the bridle-way and foot-path closely on one side, and on the other, the fruitful vineyards, olive-grounds, corn and maize fields, garden patches, and orchard enclosures, stretched away in verdant, variegated luxuriance up across the valley. This road was little frequented by quiet Mrs. Lindon. She cared little for society; and the duties of her small household absorbed the major part of her time. The produce of the ground (under the management of a worthy peasant and his wife, who, according to the fashion of the country, undertook its culture for a half share of the crops) belonged to the proprietor, of whom she rented the place, with privilege to purchase what vegetables and fruit she required from thence. The maintaining her house in the extreme order and cleanliness which her English tastes and habits taught her to hold indispensable for health and comfort, occupied a large portion of her personal attention; at first, keeping no servant. Finding, however, that her feeble health would not permit her to perform the absolute drudgery, she hired a stout girl to scrub, and scour, and cook, while she defrayed the outlay thus entailed, by seeking pupils. But her neighbourhood afforded few who could either pay for, or desired instruction. Those by whom she was surrounded were chiefly peasants, or

people scarcely richer than herself. The ministering to the wants of those among them who were even yet poorer, caused her to be solicitous to add to the yearly sum she possessed; which, had she had no other claims than her own, might have been found sufficing. But Mrs. Lindon's acquaintance with sorrow, had taught her to look for comfort in acts of kindness and benevolence towards those still more helpless and hapless than herself; and thus, many were the small timely sums, the thoughtfully-advanced succours, and seasonable reliefs, which she secretly dispensed among her ill-provided rural neighbours. These demands upon her scanty purse made her anxious to preserve its supply; and in order to this, finding her hopes of obtaining teaching fail her, she pursued a course suggested to her by one of her few Florentine friends; who, on the occasion of a visit to her pretty campagna, remarking on its beauty and neatness, added that it was large enough to admit more occupants, and that she was sure, if Mrs. Lindon chose to accommodate lodgers, those who once saw the tasteful spot, would be only too glad to take her spare rooms. The hint was acted upon; the requisite domestic arrangements were made; and the Florentine lady was requested to use her influence among the Italian residents, or English arrivals, in procuring those who might be desirous of engaging quiet apartments, where they might enjoy country air, and yet be within reach of the Tuscan capital, and its attractions of art, literature, and social intercourse.

The plan succeeded admirably. Mrs. Lindon had a succession of temporary inmates, who showed their sense of her superior manners as well as accommodations, by treating her with the consideration due to one who proved herself a lady, no less than an hostess; characters not always found in combination, any more than those who meet with them thus combined, are found to behave so courteously in return. But when the letter arrived from England, which brought Mrs. Lindon the joyful news that she might expect a visit of some length from 'Squire Heathcote and his niece, she thought herself fortunate that her house was then at liberty to receive them; since her last lodgers had just

left her ; and to a young Englishman who made application immediately after, she excused herself from letting her rooms, frankly stating that she had visitors coming, who she wished should find themselves perfectly at home and undisturbed.

It was a proud and happy day to the gentle widow, when she welcomed beneath her own roof her good friend the 'Squire, and her favourite pupil, Kate. The one, with his kindly simplicity had won her grateful esteem and regard ; the other, notwithstanding that provoking vivacity and wilfulness which had oftentimes vexed her, in her capacity of governess, had yet contrived to secure a warm corner in her heart, as one whom she loved dearly, in spite of certain faults which she rather wished cured, than felt to be disagreeable.

The gratification to her guests was unmixed. The 'Squire found himself housed quietly, and domesticated with one whom he knew ; with one whose face was familiar ; with one to whose voice he was accustomed ; no slight comforts to a man who disliked associating with strangers, feeling uneasy and out of his sphere when among them, constrained and modestly conscious of his own deficiencies, speaking no language but his own, and to whom travelling was no pleasure, inasmuch as it subjected him to these and other inconveniences, in addition to absence from his own country home. For Kate's sake he had endured all silently, cheerfully ; contented to see her pleased : but he was himself pleased, when once more settled down in a cottage that possessed all the attractions of English neatness and regularity with Italian charm of situation and prospect.

As to Kate, she was wild with delight. She saw her uncle enjoying their position ; she was with one whom they both of them esteemed and liked ; she was able to revel in the treasures of art, which the city possessed ; she could feast her eyes with the glories of nature which the surrounding country presented. Heart, mind and sense might saturate themselves with rare images of beauty, such as once stored, form unfading possessions of blissful memory ever after.

Her days at this period were a continuous succession of happy

and intellectual feasting. One day was spent much like another; but so varied were the pleasures that occurred in the course of each, that not only was there no sense of monotony, but a feeling as if more glowing amount of diversified enjoyment it was impossible to press into one period of time.

Thus, pretty much were their hours passed. They were up with the dawn, that they might enjoy the cool of the Italian morning, and because their ordinary habits made early rising usual and pleasant to them. Until breakfast, they amused themselves, the uncle strolling out into the grounds to watch the peasant and his wife at their horticultural labours, while Kate helped Mrs. Lindon in her dairy and household matters, declaring she was gathering innumerable useful hints, which were to be put into most sage practice upon her return to Heathcote Hall, although she seemed to be only idly entertaining herself with observing Italian housekeeping. The 'Squire found no less entertainment from his pursuits. He used to go and look on, as the bronze-complexioned Pietro and his wife Marietta plied their vigorous work; the woman scarcely less actively and laboriously employed than the man, which called forth not a few muttered words of reprobation from the sturdy English gentleman. As the sinewy, bare, mahogany arms and chest of the Italian rustic glistened in the sun, while he wielded the strong, curved, two-pronged hoe, in many a muscular stroke, the 'Squire's sense would whisper that that was not a bad implement for the purpose; yet his national prejudice made him murmur a word or two against the foreign-fangled mode of pecking the ground and digging trenches. His good-nature and benevolence of disposition, prompted him to try and hammer out a few words of greeting in return to the nodded salutation and smile, displaying an even row of strong ivory teeth, with which Marietta would glance up from her task of piling a heap of fresh-cut vegetables into a basket; which, when full, she raised upon her head and trudged off with, at a firm, steady pace, to sell at a market, after furnishing what supply was needed at the house. The want of Italian was at these times seriously felt by the worthy 'Squire, who wished to make some suitable reply to the

courteous words which he could make out were proffered him by these simple good people. But when he essayed to stumble out a sentence, he used to be sorely puzzled by the volubility with which they would pour out their very Tuscan politeness, in their very Tuscan dialect :*—"Signor, habbia la kompiacenza di far mi komprendere haul'he vuol dir."

Whereupon the 'Squire would smile, and hopelessly shake his head, and bashfully turn away into another path, and go and see how the horses were being fed, and watered, and groomed, by the peasant lad who had been hired as stable-boy, when a stud was added to the domestic economy of Valetta (the "Tuscan hut.") The 'Squire had easily procured two fine riding-horses for himself and niece in Florence, since they abound there.

After breakfast Kate and her uncle rode regularly into town, where they spent the chief part of the day in haunting those two grand galleries of the Uffizj and the Palazzo Pitti; the 'Squire well pleased to indulge his darling in her delight, though he was not unfrequently caught napping off into a gentle doze opposite to some of the most famous chefs-d'œuvres of Raphael or Titian. This, however, he invariably ascribed to another cause than indifference or tedium, assuring Kate that it was "the heat," merely "the heat."

They used to dine in Florence, that they might enjoy the ride in the cool of the evening, at the "Cascine;" and then, by moonlight, or starlight, later on, they would turn their horses' heads in the direction of their "campagna" homestead, after a day of pleasantly mingled exercise and repose.

The 'Squire liked extremely their evening resort to the "Cascine;" the music of the military band, the meeting so many English faces (though he rarely encountered one that was known to him), the assemblage of carriages, and people on horseback, the gay crowd on foot, the cheerfulness and brightness of the scene altogether, pleased him much; but there was one drawback to it,

* The reader need scarcely be reminded that the Florentines turn their e's and q's into h's, with ruthless and almost guttural aspiration.

which grated upon his natural and national shyness, more than he cared to own. The very shyness itself prevented him from acknowledging or taking means to avoid the nuisance, for such he felt it to be.

To a man so constitutionally as well as Britishly bashful in his retiring reserve, as the 'Squire when in public, it was no small source of discomfort that those Florentine flower-girls, with their bold, staring faces, their officious assiduities, their not-to-be denied proffers, and irrefusable homage, *would* thrust their obnoxious nosegays into his unwilling hands. It was in vain he kept fast hold of his horse's bridle; it was in vain he let nothing but the back of a closed fist meet their advance; it was in vain he turned his head away, and let his visible repugnance appear undisguisedly on his face. Somehow, these abominable, unrepulsable women, always compassed their end; and he found himself helplessly and inevitably possessed of a bunch of flowers. There was something ludicrous in feeling uncomfortable from so slight a cause, but this consciousness of absurdity did not lessen—on the contrary, it rather increased—the sense of annoyance. He could not shake it off; and each day, so far from wearing away by repetition, it grew more and more insupportable. He could not help resenting this pretence of disinterested attention, which he knew covered merest commercial alacrity; he was provoked at being compelled to receive as a gift, what he understood was expected to be ultimately paid for; he was irritated that a mercenary view was to be couched beneath a guise of friendliness and kindness, for which, forsooth, you were bound to seem grateful, when you saw through its hollow nonsense, and felt it to be a vexatious, impertinent, intrusive persecution. He was upon one occasion struggling with some such ideas, and trying to reason himself into laughing them off, instead of yielding to them, while one of these ungainsayable Floras, with her broad, flapping straw hat, and her brazen visage, was pertinaciously besetting him, standing by his horse's side, and pressing close to his knee, and forcing her offering against his knuckles, when he was suddenly relieved by her all at once giving back, as she turned her saucy, wide-mouthed glance up at some person who spoke.

It was a young English gentleman on horseback near, calling to her in her own tongue, with an authoritative, but not unplayful way, to cease from her unwelcome attentions to his countryman. She answered with some broad allusion to his own face, as affording a more attractive shrine at which to tender her floral oblation, if he would accept it.

His reply was a frank laugh, and a word or two of lively retort; after which, he turned to the 'Squire, and raising his hat, made a smiling apology for his interference, on the ground that he perceived how benevolence prevented his rescuing himself from a civility that amounted to a torment.

"I am glad you think so; I'm heartily glad you think so, and find it so; and I'm particularly obliged to you, my dear young sir, for stepping forward to my assistance. You managed it in a trice; ah, there's the benefit of being able to speak the language! It must be owned, learning has its conveniences as well as its inconveniences."

"Can there be any inconvenience in learning, sir?" smiled the young Englishman, surprised.

"Dear me! yes, to be sure—great inconvenience; the greatest trouble and inconvenience. Learning is one of the most troublesome things I know of; that is, to come by. Landing a wary old trout, after he's led you a wearisome dance up stream and down stream for an hour, is nothing to it! Learning and knowledge save trouble when once you've got them, it's true; but they're mighty troublesome to get. Once secured, they're worth anything; but to secure 'em, they're the deuce's own toil and worry. I never could face it myself, for I own I like peace and comfort, and prefer hard riding to hard reading. It's done well enough for my time; but, mind, I don't tell you youngsters it ought to do for you. You are quite right to study, and become fine scholars, and win college honours, and acquire a host of things that I can admire in others, though I've not head enough for them myself. Excuse my freedom, my dear young sir; but there's something in the sound of your English tongue, and—and—in the tone of your voice, I think, that opened my heart. Let me

thank you very cordially for your kindly coming to the aid of my foolish embarrassment."

The young gentleman made suitable answer; and, as he turned away and took leave, to evade the acknowledgments which the hearty 'Squire continued to pour forth, the light of the setting sun fell full upon his countenance, which had before been only partially seen by the latter. There was something in what he then beheld which struck the 'Squire into a thoughtful silence. This lasted all the while the music proceeded; and at its close, when Kate awoke out of the trance of attention in which it had held her, to ask him whether they should take one turn along the wooded enclosure which extends some distance farther round, forming the extremity of the "Caseine," her uncle did not hear her at first. When he did, he led to the road she proposed, now, by the drawing on of evening, freed from most of its gay frequenters. He paced slowly on, still in a reverie: while Kate, seeing him inclined to be silent, gave herself quietly up to the pleasure of the shadowy, secluded spot, with its over-arching trees; its glimpses of the river between, the glassy surface of which reflected the fast-paling light from the west, its stillness, its partial view of the blue canopy above, gradually deepening into softer and soberer tints, as the glare of day subsided into night. It was late when they arrived at Valletta, and the 'Squire had long before recovered from the unwonted fit of abstraction into which he had fallen, so that he was quite ready to respond with his usual cheerfulness to the little bustle of glad welcome with which their return home was always hailed.

Once, in the course of the evening, Kate perceived him relapse into his thoughtful mood. She was in the habit—upon the lights coming in—(when the curious antique brass lamp, with its central reservoir of oil, surrounded by dangling implements for snuffing and trimming the wick, which is still in common use thereabouts, made its appearance)—of reading Italian with Mrs. Lindon, who had kindly proposed it to her; and, while thus employed, she saw her uncle, after taking up one of the books from the table, and listlessly turning over the leaves, fix his attention

upon something he found there; and, as he continued his contemplation, she heard him give an unconscious half-sigh. On contriving to peep over his shoulder, and learn what it could be that engrossed him thus, she saw that the book was a volume of Petrarch's sonnets, that there was a picture of the poet's mistress, and that upon the one word written beneath, her uncle's eyes rested—"Laura."

She closed her own book, and drew him gently into conversation; leading it to cheerful topics, and winning Mrs. Lindon to second her intention, by supplying them with food for entertaining talk, until no trace remained of his thoughtfulness.

A few days after this, as they were strolling through the range of rooms at the Palazzo Pitti, on entering the one of them containing, among other noble paintings, Allori's magnificent painting of "Judith," the 'Squire exclaimed, "Your favourite seat is taken, Kate!"

Kate was in the habit of sitting, for a long time each day, in one particular arm-chair, which stood opposite the fine work above cited. There was something in that face, replete with luxuriant beauty of feature, yet strangely full of a dark and terrible relentlessness—formed in the very wealth of linear loveliness, but stern with inflexibility of will and resolved purpose—which possessed a singular power over the imagination of Kate Ireton. She was never tired of gazing upon the face; never weary of scrutinizing the look it wore, of scanning the meaning, of interpreting the intention, of seeking to comprehend the entire scope of that expression, which the painter's art had so subtly indicated. The vivid way in which the picture was coloured, the masterly manner in which each of the respective substances of velvet, silk, woollen, and flesh, were severally distinguished and rendered; the artistic mode in which the old woman attendant's head is introduced, in contrast with that young creature's in its full vigour and prime of beauty, were but subordinate points in the strong impression produced upon Kate. She could perceive—could appreciate them; but it was the Judith's face alone which concentrated her interest.

It chanced on this particular morning that the arm-chair her uncle always called hers was occupied by a gentleman; who, however, on hearing the 'Squire's exclamation, immediately arose, and, with a bow, relinquished it to her.

Kate had scarcely acknowledged his courtesy when a look of recognition crossed his face, as he caught sight of her uncle, and addressed him, as having met before, with easy, yet respectful grace, calling to mind their encounter at the "Casine," an evening or two since.

The 'Squire, with less of his customary good-natured readiness in reply, when spoken to pleasantly, than his niece had ever before observed in him, muttered a few inarticulate words by way of answer, and remained silently looking in the young Englishman's face, with a breathless, absent air, while the latter made a remark to Kate upon the surpassing merits of her favourite picture.

She rarely discussed her own impressions, especially when enthusiastic, rather charily hoarding them within her own heart, as sufficing delights to herself, but liable to misconstruction from others, as affected, or over-strained. But there was something in this young Englishman's manner, at once so frank, yet so unforward—a something in his tone familiar and easy, yet unassuming, open and direct, yet unobtrusive—that Kate felt at once won into equal ease and freedom with him.

She was in the midst of some very eager assent to the high praises he had bestowed upon the Judith, when her uncle suddenly broke from his silence, unheeding that she was speaking, with: "I beg your pardon, my dear young sir, but you bear so extraordinary a resemblance to a lady I once—once—knew; that is, your face is so wonderfully like—it is such a remarkable likeness—in short, I hope you will forgive me if I ask you a point-blank question. Are you related to any one of the name of Damer?"

"My mother's name was Damer, before she married," replied the young gentleman. "My father was an officer in the British

army, in India, where I was born; my own name is Cecil Lascelles."

"The same, the same! My dear young friend,—allow me to call you so," said the good 'Squire, as he grasped the young man's hand heartily between both his; "I had the honour of your admirable mother's acquaintance, many years ago, when she resided with her family in our county; and I am delighted with this opportunity of making the friendship of her son. By mercy! you have her smile, young sir! You have her eyes; you have, indeed, when you smile!"

The 'Squire's own eyes glistened as he ran on gaily and rapidly, to conceal what there might be of deeper feeling, in his gladness to behold one so near and dear to her, of whom he had never ceased to entertain a tender recollection, as a bright, superior being—the human star of his youthful manhood.

The pleasure which 'Squire Heathcote felt on first learning who Cecil Lascelles was, formed but the precursor of that which he derived from his society on farther acquaintance. His liking for him grew into strong partiality and personal attachment. He found him a most pleasant companion; lively, good-humoured, unaffected; full of animation, and light-hearted, almost boyish spirits; yet by no means shallow or ill-informed. He had had a careful education—the very best that could be procured in his native country. He had never left India before; but he was now on his way thence, to pay his first visit to the land which had given birth to both his parents, and where he was to be presented to some distinguished relations, who still survived there. Colonel Lascelles, and the honourable Laura Damer, whom he had married, and lately left a widow, were each of them descended from families of high rank; and it was with the view of reviving the connection between herself and her noble relatives (which her long sojourn in India had in a measure broken), on behalf of her only son, that Mrs. Lascelles resolved to accompany him to Britain.

They had set sail in a homeward-bound East Indiaman; which, touching at Lisbon, had given Mrs. Lascelles the oppor-

tunity of urging her son to visit the south of Europe, on his way to England, which she knew had been long a desire of his, although his wish to attend her to their journey's end would have prevented his fulfilling it, had she not pressed him to do so. He yielded at length to her persuasion, upon her assuring him that the friends who sailed with them formed sufficient escort; and that her preceding him to England would only the better enable her to execute her plans for preparing his uncle, the Earl of Wrexham, and the rest of their kindred, to receive him favourably when he should arrive.

He had crossed Portugal, Spain, and the south of France; thence had embarked to Naples, where he had made a short stay; another at Rome; and had just reached Florence, purposing to spend some time there, ere he proceeded to Milan and Venice, in his journey northward to join his mother.

When the 'Squire, Kate, and Cecil, left the gallery that morning, they spent the remainder of the day together in the adjoining fine grounds of the Boboli gardens, wandering among the deep shades of the embowered terrace-walks, during the hotter sunny hours; and when they at length emerged, in the afternoon, the 'Squire would not even then part with his young friend, but begged him to waive ceremony, and come and dine with them at the hotel, where they occupied an apartment, whenever staying in Florence.

"I feel as if I had known you long enough, my dear young sir, to use this freedom with you: just treating you as one of ourselves," said the 'Squire. "The truth is, we have no fixed residence in the town. We are staying at a friend's house, a short distance from Florence—a most pretty 'campagna,' where I hope you'll come and see us; it will be only a pleasant ride to you who are a horseman. It is in the Val d'Arno, not far from the river, and is called Valletta."

"Valletta! I know it well! A most charming place it is, and had very nearly been my own quarters. A friend here recommended it to me, as a spot where, if I could obtain admission, I should be passing comfortable. I rode over to see it, and was only too much struck with its attractions; since I found the lady

of the house could not receive me, expecting, as she did, visitors from England. I have no doubt you are these very expected friends, of whom I heard, before I saw you."

"To be sure! And you are the very young Englishman, of whom we were told, as having been inhospitably refused entrance, lest we should be incommoded," returned the 'Squire. "But I assure you, there's no want of space; and I think the least we can do, is to make room for you, and intercede with Mrs. Lindon to admit you, after all. What say you, Kate?"

"I say with you, uncle; it is the least we can do. And I undertake to do more. I will promise to make Mrs. Lindon agree to this pleasant arrangement. She lets me 'make' her do whatever I fancy; and I have no doubt that, in this instance, she'll require no 'making,' but be as pleased as ourselves."

"You are very good—very kind," said Cecil, looking his delight to both uncle and niece; "the arrangement cannot be so pleasant to you as to me; but I thank you, nevertheless, for letting me feel it will not be unwelcome. Tell Mrs. Lindon, with my kind regards, that I shall be very impatient till she can send me word I may come and take up my abode with you all at Valletta."

"I think I can answer that we shall bring you the intelligence no later than to-morrow," answered the 'Squire. "And now, what say you to a turn or two round the 'Cascine,' before we wend homewards?"

"With all my heart, sir; I shall always like the place the better, agreeable as it is in itself, for having first met you there," returned Cecil.



CHAPTER XVIII.

DAYS melted into weeks, and weeks into months, so pleasantly did the time pass with the little circle at Valletta; and yet there was no talk of Cecil's leaving Florence to continue his route. Indeed, he had received letters from Mrs. Lascelles, bidding him

to be in no haste to quit Italy, until he should have satisfied his roaming curiosity; for that she was spending the winter with her old maiden aunt, Lady Diana Freseley, at Cheltenham; and she could not have the heart to inflict upon a young man the tedious humdrum of dowager society, and nightly whist-playing, when he could pass his time so much more pleasantly and profitably abroad, while she watched his interests, and advanced his prospects for him in England. Therefore Cecil, only too rejoiced to have his mother's permission square with his own inclination, lingered where he was, deferring his visit to Lombardy and Venice until later.

He and his new friends liked each other better and better, upon further knowledge. Between persons so well suited in temper—the 'Squire, simple, honest-hearted, straightforward; Kate, plain-spoken, and unreserved; Cecil, frank and open—the intimacy and freedom of daily intercourse and daily consociation necessarily produced mutual good-will and liking. They were soon on the familiar footing of a family-party; and seemed as if they had hardly ever been any thing else, but had dwelt together all their lives. The winter was gone, and Kate Ireton had had her wish of witnessing how Christmas was spent out of England. She had had her hope amply fulfilled of passing through those long months of wonted gloom and dreary weather, with scarcely any absence of the sun. Even the cold winds which sometimes prevail in Florence, were sparing that season. Spring was bursting forth, and found Kate still with unabated, unsatiated relish of the beauties of Italy,—of its climate, its scenery, its abounding charms of Art and of Nature. The 'Squire, indeed, was not so untired of his foreign sojourn; but he took care to conceal his own secret pinings after home, so long as he perceived Kate show no symptoms of desiring to return thither.

About this time, he received a letter from Fermor Worthington—who had written several times, at no long intervals, to his friends, and they to him—stating that his father's gradual decay had at length terminated in the foreseen close; that he had died in his arms, blessing him for his filial duty and attachment, and

showing more warmth and strength of affection during those expiring moments, than he had ever before indulged himself with giving utterance to. Fermor went on to say, the discovery of how dearly and deeply his father had loved him beneath that calm, undemonstrative exterior, had profoundly affected and penetrated him; and that he now more than ever felt grateful to think he had never allowed himself to be tempted into leaving him; for not only should he have been deprived of the consolation of knowing his presence was a solace to his father, but he should have lost the supreme comfort and happiness of learning the extent of that father's love for him. The letter ended by saying, he should even now have come over to them; but that he had affairs to settle, which required personal investigation, and which had been left to his especial care by him whom he had just lost; that therefore, however unwillingly, he was compelled to give up the hope he had cherished, of being able to join them in time to accompany them back to England.

"Just like Fermor! Ever upright! Ever conscientious! Ever preferring duty to inclination; and thinking of justice to others, before indulgence to himself. A thorough fine fellow is Fermor Worthington. By mercy! I hold it an honour to be akin to him."

"Who is this excellent relation of yours, 'Squire? He must be a capital good fellow, from your mode of speaking of him," said Cecil Lascelles.

"He is a young cousin of ours—a true-bred, true-hearted young Englishman, whom I shall one day hope to make known to you, when you come to Heathcote, Cecil," returned the Squire.

Cecil Lascelles expressed his hearty concurrence in this hope; and then turned to Kate, and asked her whether she had nothing to say, that should heighten the desire to know this estimable kinsman of theirs, which the 'Squire's words had awakened.

"I have only to say that the Iron Cousin's letter is of a piece with the Iron Cousin himself; riveted in right, firm-set in principle, welded immovably and integrally in integrity," she said,

laughing. "Come, are we not to ride into Florence this morning? Shall we not be late for our Fiesole expedition, if it take place to-day? There are the horses waiting for us."

They had hardly entered the Piazza, when, as they approached the post-office, the 'Squire uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure, at seeing a gentleman whom he recognized at once as an old hunting associate of his, loitering near, about to apply for letters.

He rode up to him, leaned from his horse, gave him a hearty slap on the shoulders, and shouted in his ear a fox-hunting view-halloo, which rang sharp, and loud, and strange, all over the broad Piazza.

The gentleman turned, in measureless astonishment, to behold his old friend, 'Squire Heathcote, in the heart of Florence.

After making vices of their hands, and nearly dislocating each other's arms, and all but wrenching them from their sockets, they seemed to have arrived at a satisfactory attempt to convey some faint idea of their over-boiling content at this unexpected meeting; and then the 'Squire begged his friend to come to the hotel immediately, and lunch, and dine, and spend the day with him, and chat over all they had to say to each other. This was the more necessary, as the friend was obliged to leave Florence that same afternoon. Finding such to be the case, the 'Squire turned to Kate and Cecil, and told them he should not detain them from the proposed excursion for that day; bade his niece not think of giving it up on his account; and smilingly told her that he should do very well without her for these few hours, and that she must try and do without him for the like short time, just for once in a way.

There had been a riding-jaut and pic-nic planned to Fiesole and its neighbourhood; Kate and her uncle having promised Cecil to be of the party, to which they had been invited, and which had been made up for him by some young friends of his in Florence to whom he had brought letters of introduction on his first arrival. There were ladies among them, sisters of his male acquaintances, so that 'Squire Heathcote had no hesitation

in sending his niece, although he could not go with her, telling Cecil he confided her to his care, and saying that they were to return straight to Valletta, instead of coming back through Florence, as he should probably be home long before them, the 'Squire went away with his old companion, in high spirits and glee.

The equestrian portion of the cavalcade consisted of some fashionable young people, residing there for the season; whose parents, having been formerly acquainted with the Damer family, Cecil Lascelles was received with much cordiality among them, when he tendered his mother's credentials of presentation. The elders went in carriages; and altogether, the party formed a considerable assemblage. The spot where they were to dine, was on one of the umbrageous lawns in the gardens of Pratolino. The ride thither was very entertaining to Kate Ireton. There was sprightly conversation going on between Cecil Lascelles and his acquaintances, to which she listened with the amusement and interest of one who had seldom associated with young people of her own age. It was curious to her, who had seen no specimen of the genus, fashionable young lady, save Alicia White,—this opportunity of watching some of their appearance and behaviour.

There was a dashing girl, named Constantia Smythe, sister to a young cavalry officer, who looked like her brother's counterpart, rather exaggerated; for while he lisped and used essence on his pocket-handkerchief, and wore extremely shiny boots, which he seemed sadly afraid would get covered with dust, and had an eye-glass screwed into his eye to inspect the accurate fitting of his lemon-coloured kid gloves,—she talked in a loud, abrupt voice, stuck her handkerchief into the breast of her habit, cared nothing for displaying her boots, dusty or not dusty, in mounting and dismounting, stared straight at every thing, and boldly at every body; drew up her riding gauntlets with the tug of a dragoon, and slashed the skirt of her habit with her whip, as a man slaps his knee, to give emphasis to her speech. There was a die-away girl, who languished and simpered, and protested

she was sinking with fatigue, and fainting with the heat, and swooning with exhaustion and excitement. There was a sketching girl, who was always begging them to stop, even if they could not wait while she took some "charming bit," or some "point of view," or some "chiaro-scuro effect." There was a sentimental girl; a poetical girl; and a scientific girl; who each worked hard to impress upon the bystanders the peculiar characteristic which she chose to adopt as her becoming individuality. No professional young woman could have been more assiduous and diligent at her calling than these amateur young ladies at their trade of self-exhibition; yet each of them could, upon occasion, inveigh against actresses, sneer at singers, and scorn artists of all kinds. It was edifying to hear them expatiate upon the vanity, the public display, the mercenariness, the indelicacy, the degradation of person and talent, in such people; but conceit, show-off, calculations of rent-rolls, submitting to court and be courted without one spark of preference, seeking matches with shameless eagerness, and making a mart of accomplishments, with wealthy wedlock in view, instead of exerting themselves with independent livelihood as an object, were quite different matters.

"Why, Lascelles!" shouted Miss Constantia Smythe to Cecil (she invariably addressed men by their surnames, without any superfluous prefatory 'Mr. '), and glancing at Kate Ireton as she spoke, "what a silent addition to the party, your companion Miss What's her-name, is! Is she too timid to speak? Tell her not to be afraid of us. We sha'n't eat her up at a mouthful."

"I'm not at all timid; and I'm sure I have nothing to fear from any of you," replied Kate, answering for herself, and with a roguish smile in her eyes. "You, none of you, I think would be able to gobble me up, even if I were dainty enough to tempt you."

"But you might be afraid of another kind of snapping up, more terrible than being munched and eaten. I mean quizzing, child. You might be afraid, if you entered into talk, we might be tempted to cut you up, though we mightn't eat you, you know."

"I don't know what quizzing is, woman," said Kate, laughing
"Woman!" echoed Miss Smythe, indignantly.

"Child!" returned Kate, in the same tone, but still laughing "If I am young enough to be called 'child,' you are, perhaps womanly enough to be called 'woman.'"

There was a smile on Cecil Lascelles' lips, and on that of one or two other young men who rode nearest to the speakers, at this palpable hit of Kate's at Miss Constantia's manly style.

Miss Smythe caught the expression of their faces, and looked, for a moment, nettled. The next instant, she burst into a loud laugh, and exclaimed, with that peculiar slash of her whip before mentioned, "*Corpo di Bacco!* as they say here,—that's not bad! I've a notion that it's some or other of us who'll have to be afraid, not you. For a young lady innocent, who don't know what quizzing means, it's a tolerable beginning."

"I'm happy to take a hint of fashionable practices, from one who seems so accomplished in them," said Kate.

"A hint to avoid, or a hint to acquire?" asked Miss Smythe.

"I leave you to judge which would become me best," answered Kate.

"Ah, you're a sly puss, I can see, with all your quiet ways. Once rouse you from your sleek silence, and you can show your teeth, and claws too, with the best of us. But I like you none the worse for it; I like you none the worse for it. I admire a girl of spirit."

"I might retort the 'sly puss' with 'you're a jolly dog,' or 'well done, my buck!' But you might take such names as too complimentary; others might say, 'I like you the worse for them; I like you the worse for them.'"

"Here, Lascelles, Byng, Maberley, one of you creatures, come and take this gentle damsel off my hands! She's too much for me, I own," said Miss Constantia, pushing back her hat from her forehead, and looking round her with a laugh.

"You can't have too much of a good thing, surely," smirked Ensign Byng, as he moved his horse towards Kate; "and Miss Ireton has been saying nothing but good things for the last ten minutes."

"Pert things can't be called good things, can they?" replied

she. "Bad things, rather; and bad things are apt to be offensive things. Let me assure Miss Smythe that they were not meant offensively, though they might be spoken a little flippantly, for the sake of answering her own smart jesting."

Miss Constantia Smythe burst into her horse-laugh, assuring Kate that she was a good soul, and she heartily forgave her for any rudeness, and would have liked her better if she hadn't shown the white feather at last by apologizing.

"There's nothing craven in apology, when you know yourself to blame: if I hadn't felt that I really was perhaps rude in speaking as I did to a perfect stranger, I should never have dreamed of offering a single word that seemed like owning I was wrong," said Kate.

"It'th a deuthed baw, that owning one 'th wrong," lisped the young officer, Constantia's brother; "I don't know a thing at all, that'th a maw deuthed and dethided baw, than athking pardon, and forgiveneth, and tho-fawth. A brathe of pithtolth, and fawty patheth, are thiethty timeth better, any day."

"Even if you have, through mistake, hurt a person's feelings, do you think it would be better to risk killing him, or to give him a chance of blowing your—at least of shooting you through the head, than to say you're sorry?" said Kate.

"Oh, thpare me, pray, Mith Ireton!" drawled Mr. Henry Smythe; "I'm not equal to a wit. You're a wit, you know! Now, I never pretended to be a wit, and never thall be a wit, and haven't the leatht dethire to be a wit."

"You are better than a wit; you are a wise man," she said. "You have self-knowledge, and are above setting your heart upon hopeless and unattainable objects. They say, a contented mind is a perpetual feast; what an epicurean life you must lead!"

"Gad! Talking of feathting, and epicureth and tho-fawth," he returned, with more energy of manner than he had yet shown, "I'm curthed hungry, I can tell you that! I wonder when we shall ever arrive at thith deuthed what-ye-call-'em plathe—Pra tolino?"

"It's not far off now," said young Maberley. "And a good thing too! Then we shall have a glass of champagne all round, which'll do us good. It's confounded slow, this *pic-nic*-ing business—all but the eating and drinking part of the concern."

"Oh, you Goth!" exclaimed the sentimental young lady, which he, taking as a flattering token that she wished to have a little flirtation, rode round to her side, and indulged her by listening to the silly nothings, and sickly platitudes, she commenced levelling at his heirship to three thousand a-year.

When they arrived at Pratolino, there was a general descent from the carriages, and dismounting from horseback, that the whole party might stroll through the lovely grounds.

"Lascelles, my good fellow! come and give me your shoulder!" cried Miss Constantia Smythe; "though I can get off my horse myself, yet I don't scorn the help of a man, when I can get it!" And she laughed long and loud.

"One moment, and I am at your service, Miss Smythe," returned Cecil, as he stayed by Kate, to assist her from her saddle.

"Oh, there's Byng will attend to your young lady friend! I see he's waiting to dismount her," returned Miss Smythe. "Come here, when I bid you."

"Pardon me," answered Cecil Lascelles, without stirring; "Miss Ireton's uncle gave her into my especial charge. I will but fulfil my duty, and then I'm at your disposal."

"I'll take care of Miss Ireton. Miss Ireton, permit me," said Ensign Byng, gallantly advancing.

"Excuse me," persisted Cecil, quietly; "I was entrusted to attend upon Miss Ireton, and I cannot let another perform my office."

"I would not have detained you so long, Cecil, but that the lash of my whip got entangled in the horse's net," said Kate. "Now I am ready."

Cecil lifted her down, and then drew her arm within his, as he moved in the direction of Miss Smythe.

"Give me leave—one instant, Kate," he said, as he quitted

her, to step forward, and yield the required aid to Miss Constantia; but she leaped off before he could reach her side, crying with her usual horse-laugh: "You'll be a little quicker next time I ask you to lend me a hand, sir squire of dames! I can't wait all day, while you're dawdling and dangling after fifty other women before you come to me. Here, Byng! give me your arm, there's a good fellow, for a ramble through the park. I'll promise not to make too strong love to you! You needn't be afraid to trust yourself with me."

The party broke up into walking detachments, of two and two, or three and four together, according to the inclination of the moment, with the general understanding that they were all to meet at a particular spot, half an hour hence, for dinner.

Kate and Cecil walked on, arm-in-arm, content to enjoy the beauty of the place in silence, and glad of a little peace and quiet, amid so much chatter, and criticism, and rapturizing that was going on around them; but they were not long left undisturbed, since Miss Constantia Smythe took a fancy to lounge by Cecil's side, while Ensign Byng loitered near to Kate Ireton, entertaining her with a dissertation upon the last new opera produced at Florence, although she told him she had heard the music and knew it well.

The repast went off, as such kind of repasts usually do; that is to say, there was a great deal of needless profusion, each member of the party having been anxious not to be outdone in ostentatious contribution by the others; or, dreading to seem mean, had been foolishly extravagant; and then, when all was over, no one choosing to reclaim their overplus, or have it collectively gathered, it was wasted and left; grooms, horseboys, and people at the lodge, battenning upon heaps of Strasburg pies, cold fowls, tongues in jelly, pates-de-foie-gras, rich cakes, and floods of champagne.

At length, the party re-assembled, and the cavalcade was reformed to return to Florence, taking Fiesole in their way.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Tho!" exclaimed the young cavalry officer, as he fitted his glass into his eye, and held it there by a dexterous pinch of his brow and cheek, and looked around: "Tho! thith ith the famouth thpot where the old chap thpyed at the Heaventh till he found out that the Earth didn't thtand thtock thtill, but thpun round!"

"Ay, this is indeed the 'top of Fiesole!' You remember, of course, Milton's splendid lines?" said the poetical young lady. And as every body remembered them, she proceeded to mouth out the well-known passage, in a forced, unnatural strain, which if anything could destroy its beauty, would effectually have done so. It is a curious thing, that people rarely trust poetry to its own music, by uttering it in a natural tone, but must distort it into meaningless rant and bellow, on the plea of giving it due effect.

The scientific young lady entered upon a discussion of the motion of the terrestrial globe, which went to prove that the Florentine astronomer, so far from deserving any credit for his discovery, was all but a dolt, for not having earlier hit upon so self-evident a theory.

The sentimental young lady declared that she "perfectly idolized that dear old Galileo! and that he was a brave darling to speak his mind in the very teeth of the Inquisition."

"But they brought him upon his marrow-bones, and made him eat his words, and threatened him with the infernal regions, if he found out any more such bewildering facts," said Ensign Byng; "however this didn't seem to have the proper effect upon the sturdy old star-gazer, since he profanely muttered, as he rose from his knees, 'For all that, it moves!'"

"In short, they told him he'd be d——d if he insisted it did move, and he said he'd be d——d if it didn't," observed young Maberley. "Upon my soul, this is all confounded slow. I'll tell you what, I can't stand it any longer. I vote, we're off to Flo

rence, and leave this confounded, dull, stupid old hill, and its conceited old big-wig discoverer, and all his old humbug twaddle."

"Oh, you abominable Vandal! You vilest vile of wretches!" screamed the sentimental young lady, all the while looking unutterable encouragement at him.

"I think you'll enjoy Fiesole better, some other day, when your uncle and you and I come here by ourselves, Kate, sha'n't you?" said Cecil Lascelles, as he led his companion down the short declivity, at the foot of which the party had been obliged to leave the horses and carriages, that they might walk up to the summit and brow of the hill—only to be reached on foot.

Kate Ireton gave a smiling nod in return, and then added: "Yet I'm glad, too, that I've seen it as I have done; otherwise, I could hardly imagine how the charm of such a scene should be so marred by triviality, or how it should fail of inspiring a rather soberer frame of mind—a little more of the silence of respect and good feeling. I can scarcely understand idle chattering in a scene like this, filled as it is, too, with such sublime associations!"

She stopped, as she spoke, to gaze. The flood of warm, golden, afternoon-light poured in a rich stream upon the grand extent of valley which the spot on which they stood commanded. In the middle distance lay the green luxuriance of vines, corn-fields, and orange-groves, covering the plain for miles with its fertile, verdurous beauty; studded with white villas, and broken into varied, picturesque compartments of farm, orchard, and agricultural enclosure. In the farther distance might be seen, glistening brightly amid the universal sunny effusion, the towers and domes of the lovely city, "*Firenze la bella*," truly named, rearing their proud crests with stately majesty, upon the brink of Arno, that stretches its silver line away on either side, straight across the fair valley. In the extreme distance beyond, lay the undulating, gently-rising eminence, which skirts and encloses the scene with its empurpled horizon, forming a magnificent back-ground to the picture Kate beheld.

She drew a breath of deep, full satisfaction, as she turned away from it, and suffered Cecil to place her once more on horse-

back. They proceeded for some time in complete silence, until some of the other equestrians joined them, and would talk, and make them talk.

"My good fellow, Lascelles! I wish you would tell us the reason why the murderous folks in this land kill all the singing-birds?" said Miss Constantia Smythe. "One may ride all day through Italian country roads, and not hear a thrush or a linnet, for love or money."

"A partridge or a pheasant would be more to the purpose, if a fellow could get a shot at one," said Ensign Byng. "Don't you think so, Miss Ireton?"

"As I'm not a fellow, and never shoot, I'm no judge," she replied.

"I fancy, Miss Smythe, the Italian peasantry destroy thrushes and linnets for the same purpose as the larger birds—to make game of them," said Cecil.

"There's no fun in such game," she replied. "Surely, there's not picking enough upon such very small fry—or small roast."

"Yet we don't disdain larks! Plenty of fun in them, I hope! The soberest of us like a lark now and then! We're up to that game, at any rate," remarked young Maberley.

"It's very certain they do kill and eat singing-birds here, you'll see 'em by dozens, any day, in every Italian market," said the Ensign. "It's my opinion, they destroy 'em out of spite, as rivals, since Italy's so famous for human singing-birds. They roast and eat the nightingales, like ogres, lest they should outdo themselves, and get engagements in London or Paris."

"But why are you so anxious about the fate of the little birds, Miss Smythe, since you wouldn't hear them if they sang?" said Cecil.

"Why not, pray?" she replied.

"You'd be so busy talking, and telling yourself to listen, and calling upon us to hearken, that there'd be no hearing the magpies and parrots,—I mean the thrushes and linnets. Now, just look here; look up, above your head! Don't you see what a delicious scent there is?"

"What are you talking about, Sir Impudence? You know I put up with any liberty from you, or you wouldn't dare be so audacious," she said, with her loud laugh.

"I know you are all-forgiving, all-forgiving," he rejoined, "or I should not presume; but——"

"Come, let's hear what you mean by looking up to see a scent," she interrupted.

"Why, is it not as reasonable, as to expect me to view a prospect by hearing you talk about it; or listen to singing through the incessant wagging of your fair tongue? The other night, at La Pergola, I could not hear one note of 'Semiramide,' because you favoured me with a seat in your box. But seriously, did you ever smell anything more delicious than the perfume of these pine-trees? The heat of the sun brings out the full aromatic strength, as we pass beneath."

Miss Smythe was about to answer, but Cecil exclaimed, "Hush!"

"Nonsense!" she began; "I've no notion ——"

"Be still; be quiet!" he said; "don't interrupt me; I want to enjoy the fragrance in peace and comfort; and I can't smell if you talk."

She said no more, but sat switching the boughs, half sulkily, whistling, in a peevish, discontented way, to herself.

They had all stopped for a moment to inhale the exquisite scent of the pine-trees; when Kate Ireton reached up to gather one of the cones, so handsome in its warm brown rind of rugged regularity. She had formed her riding-whip into a round loop, that she might hook down the pine-cone; when suddenly the circle gave way, and its elasticity caused the whip to spring from her hand. She saw it disappear down the steep descent immediately on the other side of the turf bank, against which she was.

Without another thought, than eagerness to regain the lost whip, she urged her horse over, and dashed down the green hollow. It was so sheer and precipitous, that the sight of Kate's rash plunge called forth a simultaneous exclamation of horror from those who witnessed it.

Cecil Lascelles was about to dash after, and spurred his horse against the bank; but in the moment that the animal checked at the leap, Miss Smythe laid her hand on Cecil's arm exclaiming:—"Don't be a fool, Lascelles! If that mad, headlong girl chooses to break her neck, why need you? Stop," she added; "if you will go after her—there's a gate, a few yards back, that I noticed as we came along, from which there's doubtless a way down into the dell."

"True, you're right; I shall be better able to help her; you're right." And he turned his horse's head, and hurried off.

"By Jove! I never saw such a leap! She's a capital horse-woman, 'faith! Few old practised hands at steeple-chasing but would have shied at such a depth as that!" said young Maberley, as he looked over into the wooded chasm.

"And one can't see anything of her," observed Ensign Byng, who was peering over also. "The place is so thick with trees, and the ground so broken, besides dropping so suddenly, that there's no making anything out a few feet down."

"What in the name of folly could induce the girl to bolt over in that slap-dash, devil-me-care fashion?" said young Maberley.

"Oh, nothing but because she'd dropped her riding-whip, and must needs fly after it, like one bewitched. The girl must be cracked, I think," said Miss Constantia, "to fling herself down into such a hole as that!"

"She's a deuced fine girl, cracked, or not cracked," said Ensign Byng; "and it'd be a thousand pities if she came to any harm."

"If she were to crack her skull, for instance," roared Miss Smythe, "then she'd be cracked, with a vengeance, eh? Take my word for it, Byng, she'll come upon her feet fast enough; such creatures always do."

Meanwhile, Cecil had reached the gate, and found that it opened into a deep rubbly lane, more like a water-course than a road; down which he managed to guide his horse for a little way; but finding this delayed him, he dismounted, and fastening his horse to a tree, proceeded on foot. He called eagerly upon Kate's name, as he went that he might be guided to where she was, by her

voice, if able to reply; and to his great joy he heard her not long after, calling in answer, and in a cheerful tone.

But when he saw her, he soon perceived that she had been more hurt than she was willing to let appear. She was off her horse—she owned that she had been thrown—her veil was torn, her face much scratched by the brambles and thorny underwood, through which she had been borne by her rapid downward course; there was a cut upon her temple, and she was very pale, although her eyes had lost none of their brightness, but wore a certain look of satisfied, almost triumphant, animation. In her hand she held the recovered riding-whip.

"I am quite safe—only a few scratches and bruises—not hurt—not even frightened;" she said rapidly, as he approached. "My poor horse is the more alarmed of the two," she added, as she continued to pat the creature's neck, and tried to soothe it. "It is not so accustomed to my mode of riding as my own English White Bess, at home at Heathcote. If I had had her, she would have thought nothing of such a hillock; she would have known it was only her mistress's way."

"Rather a fearful way too, is it not? Do you often take it into your head to gallop down steepes such as this?" said Cecil, as he looked at the perilous place she had ventured down.

"A mere slope!" she said, laughing. "When you come to Heathcote, uncle and I will show you dykes that shall make this seem a garden ha-ha. But I am bragging. All I say is, wait till you take a fox-hunting ride with us in merry England. Meantime, help me to calm poor trembling Bayardo, who sadly belies his knightly courser name."

. After they had succeeded in reassuring the scared horse, Cecil was preparing to help Kate into her seat again, when she involuntarily winced, as from sharp and sudden pain.

"You are hurt, after all, Kate!" Cecil exclaimed, as he looked at her anxiously.

"No, no," she said, faintly laughing; "I have strained my hand a little, I think; and I feel it when I use it, that's all

Wait, let me take breath one moment—it will go off. Now, lift me!”

“I cannot think why you should have hazarded such a plunge!” he said, after a few moments, as he led her horse on towards the spot where he had left his own; “surely, the loss of a whip was of no consequence. It could not be worth while to risk your life for such a trifle.”

“Perhaps not,” she replied, “but I hate to be foiled; and when I saw it spin out of my hand, my first impulse was to get it back, at all risks! You don’t know how fond I am of my own way, Cecil. I seldom let a little prevent my securing it.”

“But this was not a little. It was really running a fearful chance, however light you make of it, Kate,” he returned.

“It was nothing compared to the great delight of not being conquered; if I had allowed myself to be deprived by an accident of this—trifle as it may be—I should have felt vexed, defeated; and it is not pleasant to one of my nature to feel vanquished. I have been so accustomed to my own will, that I can’t do without it,” she said, smiling.

He shook his head as he returned the smile. “An ‘accident’ might have ‘deprived’ you of something more important than a paltry whip—your life, Kate. And then, with what face could I have returned to your uncle, who gave you into my charge?”

“Ah, now you are serious, Cecil. The thought of him, and what he would have felt, makes me grave, indeed.” She paused then resumed: “Cecil, let us take immediate leave of your friends, and return home with best speed to Valletta; it will prevent my uncle from becoming anxious, should he have already returned.”

“By all means,” answered Cecil, as they hastened on at a quicker pace to rejoin those who were awaiting them above.

In few words, Kate’s desire to repair home without delay was explained by Cecil; and after polite enquiries on the part of the others, and assurances on hers that she was unhurt, with

courteous acknowledgment of the pleasant day's excursion in their company, she took leave. As they proceeded, Cecil perceived that Kate, in spite of her endeavour to carry all off bravely, was in reality suffering much. The pallor of her face looked ghastly against the crimson drops which oozed from the hurt upon her temple; and her brow had that peculiar contraction which betrays suppressed bodily pain. While she essayed still to talk on, she every now and then involuntarily dropped into silence; and the colourless lips would occasionally give an irrepressible quiver.

Cecil waited until they reached the diverging road, where they were to turn off towards Valletta; and then, seeing her prepare to follow it, he begged that she would go round by Florence, that they might procure a carriage to convey her home, as he was sure the pull of the rein upon her sprained wrist hurt her more than she would allow.

"No, no," she said; "it will occupy more time; and besides, the sight of the carriage would only alarm uncle, and make him fancy there was something the matter. No, no; let us take the way across the valley; it is much nearer. I long to be home."

And now, after two or three resumed attempts to maintain conversation, she allowed herself to lapse into welcome speechlessness, which her companion took care not to interrupt. At length, as they approached the Arno, they beheld the 'Squire himself, riding towards them, along the river-side road.

He had been to Valletta, after seeing his friend off, and not finding Kate and Cecil returned, had come back to meet them. The moment he was near enough to gain a sight of Kate's white face, speckled and streaked with the tokens of her fall, the good 'Squire uttered a broken exclamation, and hurried to her side.

"Merciful Heaven! my dear child—my dear girl—what has happened? Kate, my Kate, speak to me!"

She strove her best to answer strongly, laughingly: "Nothing! nothing at all, dear uncle! A scratch or two. Italian

Bayardo is not English Bess, that's all! He threw me; which royal Bess—fair Bess—my own beautiful White Bess—the Bess of Besses, would never have done! But we must forgive him!”

“I cannot, I cannot forgive myself, for trusting you upon him; a strange horse; for trusting you out of my sight! How was it? How did it come about? Tell me how it was, Cecil. Kate is such a horsewoman, that I cannot understand——” He broke off eagerly.

“The fact is, Kate ventured a leap such as no one but her own fearless self would have dreamed of,” said Cecil Lascelles. “Her whip slipped from her hand, and she must needs regain it at all risks. It sprang down a green rift, some twenty feet in depth; and though the ground shelved more like a precipice than a bank, our young Amazon dashed over, at full tilt, as if performing a feat for the honour of English horse-riding.”

But the light tone which Cecil took, in order to relieve the good 'Squire's fears, failed to calm him. Alarmed, agitated, angry with himself for allowing her to leave him, vaguely vexed with Cecil for having suffered this to occur, fretted with Kate, and fretting for her, he vented his mingled emotion upon the cause of her accident; and exclaiming—“What, for an idle toy such as this, you could run the chance of killing yourself, and breaking my heart, child? I shall never bear the sight of it again!” he snatched the whip from her hand, and flung it into the river.

A vivid colour flushed up into Kate's face for one instant, and the next as suddenly receding, left it even whiter than before. Then she swerved feebly in her saddle; and her uncle had only time to catch her in his arms, or she would have fallen from her horse.

“My darling! my Kate! For God's sake, Cecil, help me to support her; she is hurt, she is wounded. My heart misgave me when I saw the blood upon her face; she has received some injury, though she tried to conceal it from us. My own brave heart! my dear child! Kate! dear, dear Kate!”

"I am well—better, dear uncle," Kate forced herself to articulate; "let me lean upon you quietly, and I shall be able to reach home."

As the faint whisper reached her uncle's ear, he pressed her gratefully to him, and bade her exert herself to speak no more, and then he and Cecil Lascelles, between them, guided her horse slowly onward to Valletta.

CHAPTER XX.

"AND now, dear uncle, having 'washed this filthy witness' from my face, as the tragedy queen says, see how well and whole I am!" said Kate, hastening down to rejoin him, as soon as Mrs. Lindon had bathed her temple, looked to her sprained and swollen hand, and given her some restoratives, which revived, and lent her strength and spirit to appear quite recovered. "Generally, it is we poor women who are supposed to shrink and turn pale at sight of a little blood; but here's one of the manly lords of the Creation, losing his wits with fright; while Mrs. Lindon, like a heroine of old, plays the leech and the comforter."

"I'm a coward, I own, Kate, where a certain saucy baggage is concerned!" replied her uncle, greatly inspirited at seeing her able to make her appearance in the sitting-room, instead of being compelled to remain up-stairs for the night, and leave him a prey to all sorts of suspense, and wild, exaggerated fears; "I shall never be anything else than a simpleton about you, I believe; nay, so far from becoming cured, here have I been inwardly swearing at myself, for giving you out of my own charge, and all but openly abusing Cecil, for taking it upon himself."

"He deserves thanks instead of blame, for the manner in which he fulfilled it," she replied; "and you are immediately not only to thank him, but to forgive me, for getting into a scrape in spite of his care. He did his best to rate me properly for my

misbehaviour; and I did mine to show him I always did as I chose, and that therefore he was not answerable for any harm I came to. We both acted in character; he as my deputed guardian, I as my wilful self. Therefore, I expect you'll give us each your hearty commendations; especially now that you see our acts have had no fatal consequence."

"Give me a kiss, sauce-box, and have your own way," said the 'Squire. "You know that is how we always end."

"Thank you, Kate, for contriving to look so well, and for obtaining my exculpation besides your own; by showing how, in the words of your tragedy queen, 'a little water clears us of this deed,'" said Cecil. "If being thrown from your horse is to have the effect of making you look only brighter and fresher than before, we must get you to ride Bayardo daily, till you bring him into too good training to be worth anything."

"She shall never mount the beast again!" exclaimed the 'Squire, passionately.

"Nay, nay, Bayardo must not be left out of the general pardon," said Kate. "I mean to give you one more kiss, uncle, which is to seal his forgiveness too. Promise, promise!" she said, playfully suspending the caress, as she bent over him, and made him speak the words she desired.

"You do with me as you will, Kate," said the placable 'Squire; "but I had almost vowed you should never ride again, until you could have your own White Bess."

"Almost vowed, is not quite! Beware how you ever vow anything without asking my leave, uncle, lest I make you forsworn, if it should chance to be what I disapprove," smiled she.

"And now, Kate," said Mrs. Lindon's quiet voice, "having shown yourself, and proved that you are neither among the 'returned killed,' nor even the 'maimed and wounded,'—which you insisted would be the impression if I did not suffer you to come down and convince your uncle's own eyes,—I shall exercise my authority of leech and head-nurse, by ordering you at once off to bed."

'Ay, that reminds me of nights of yore and my old childish

detestation of bed-time, so hateful a break-up of pleasant evening hours!" laughed Kate.

But the tone of the laugh, and that peculiar brilliancy of the eye, and glow of the cheek,—which had recovered from its white hue only by one bright spot,—taught Mrs. Lindon to be firm for once. "I am going, however, to be more peremptory than—to my shame be it owned—I used, in those old governess times of yore. I am now imperative, and mean to be obeyed," she said, with smiling seriousness.

"Ah, you say I rule you, uncle! But you see I'm ruled in my turn; like many a tyrant, submitting to be swayed in secret by a yet stricter tyranny than my own. Louis the Eleventh to his people, snubbed in private by his counsellor and barber-surgeon, Olivier le Dain, are represented to the life by you, and me, and Mrs. Lindon. You are the poor oppressed people, uncle; I'm King Louis, of estimable memory; and Mrs. Lindon is the precise impersonation of the crafty leech and back-stairs despot."

"I'll tell you what, Ceci!, my boy," said the 'Squire, after Kate and Mrs. Lindon had left the room some time, during which he had been pacing up and down thoughtfully, while Cecil sat at the table, engaged with a book, seeing his companion inclined to be silent; "I'll tell you what you must do for me, to relieve my conscience, which has been taking me to task this last half-hour, for my fit of bad temper. I flung away poor Kate's whip in a passion, and charged you in my heart with want of proper care of her, and committed fifty unreasonable vagaries in my vexation and alarm; when all along it was my own neglect, and nothing else, that was to blame. I have never lost sight of her for a single day together, Cecil, since first I held her in my arms, a new-born, orphaned baby; and I never will again, if it please Heaven, until I am called from earth and from her at once. She was unwilling herself, bless her! to leave me this morning; and I am fitly punished for allowing her to go without me. It shall not happen so again. But it was not this I had to say, Cecil. What I want you to do for me, my dear boy,—to enable me to make reparation for my hastiness to Kate, and to

show me that you forgive me for my testiness toward you,—is to go into town the first thing to-morrow, and choose the very handsomest riding-whip you can find for me, to give Kate, in lieu of the one I so pettishly flung away, poor child ! ”

“ My dear 'Squire, you could not give me a pleasanter commission,” said Cecil. “ It is only your own tender conscience that could make you accuse yourself, for a moment, of any other treatment than that which you have always shown me—the kindest ; as it is your own generosity which prompts you to this mode of letting me share your pleasure in Kate's safety, by deputing me to be purchaser of the present that is to congratulate her. Depend on me, my dear sir ; it shall be the most tasteful one that Florence can produce.”

“ Exactly, my boy ; it is because I have great confidence in your good taste, that I trust you to get it for me,” said the 'Squire. “ Remember,” added he, as he placed his purse in the young man's hand, “ I rely upon you, that it shall do her old uncle credit, and please my Kate.”

The next morning Cecil Lascelles was on horseback, and away from Valletta betimes, that he might return before Kate should make her appearance below. He had heard Mrs. Lindon say that she should insist upon her patient's breakfasting in her own room ; and thus he hoped to be able to bring back the 'Squire's gift, ready for him to present to his niece the first thing, when they all met.

The good 'Squire himself was like a child in his pleased impatience. He was glad that Mrs. Lindon had issued her fiat for Kate's remaining up-stairs until after the morning meal (when once he had ascertained that her night's rest had done much to restore her), lest he should be tempted to let his secret escape him, and tell her the surprise he was preparing for her. Then he fidgeted about the vineyard and garden ; then strolled into the stable ; then returned to the breakfast-parlour, and drummed upon the pane of the window that looked towards the Florence road. At last, when he had just worked himself up into the determination of mounting his horse, and going out to

meet Cecil, he saw him approach, at a pace that none but an Englishman,—or an ostrich,—would think of galloping at, in such a sun-heat as then prevailed.

The success of the exhibition was soon told; and the long, slender packet held up in triumphant evidence. But the 'Squire would not have it opened, until Kate should come down.

"She shall have the pleasure of unfastening it herself, and of the first sight," said the 'Squire. "I don't want to examine it before she sees it. I'm quite satisfied with your choice, Cecil, my boy. I know you'd take care it was the best thing of the kind that could be procured; and Florence is just the place for these tasteful knick-knackereries."

"I found abundance to select from, where I went, sir," replied Cecil; who, seeing the good 'Squire's state of anxiety that Kate should appear, strove to amuse his attention by rattling on till then; "the only difficulty was, to decide upon one among so many, each temptingly beautiful in their several styles. I had half fixed upon one that took my fancy, from its richness of colour, and finished Florentine workmanship,—the top being of 'pietra dura,' mounted in gold. But just as I had nearly made up my mind, a gentleman lounged into the place. I saw at once he was an Englishman; there was no mistaking the genuine Britannia metal—an amalgam of pride and shyness, with its hall-mark of cold, haughty, supercilious distance, yet restraint,—that air which stamps us all, more or less, when travelling abroad. I say 'us,' you know, 'Squire, considering myself, by right of parentage, one of the race whom we all allow ourselves to have a fling at, and all are proud to claim kindred with. Well, what should my gentleman do, but pounce upon the very riding-whip I had half resolved to take. The shopman told him so; upon which he only honoured him with a long, silent stare, and then turned round, and conferred upon me just such another. I could not help laughing; but explained to him, that if he had any particular desire for that whip, I would cede it to him, as I was, in fact, divided between it and one delicately headed with ivory, carved after a design of Cellini's, which I almost thought the

more elegant of the two. The Englishman heard me out, with his eyes glassily fixed upon my face all the while I spoke, and then when I had finished, turned round to the shopman, took out his purse, told out upon the counter the sum which had been named as the price of the whip he admired, deliberately drew the rings of his purse to again, put it into his pocket, took up the riding-whip, and with a slight bow to me, slowly walked out of the shop."

"What, without a word?" laughed the 'Squire.

"From beginning to end," said Cecil. "The shopman looked at me, with his Italian expressive twinkle of the eye, as he said, 'You might take the signor for a dumb man, but he's only an Inglese. That's their way. They avoid words, as they would scalding polenta.' Well, I then concluded upon the ivory-headed whip; not altogether sorry that I was constrained to make it my choice, since I've a notion that Kate will prefer its chaste beauty, its skill and taste of design, to the more showy richness of the other."

Kate's admiration of the whip, when she saw it, fully warranted Cecil's idea; while her delight in receiving her uncle's present, even fulfilled his gleeful anticipation of the pleasure it would afford her.

She looked her thanks; she looked in his face with glistening eyes, through which spoke a yet intenser feeling than pleasure—deep, heartfelt gratitude for the love, the strong, ceaseless affection, the ever-vigilant desire and care to promote her happiness, of which this gift was but the type. At once to conceal and indulge her emotion, she hurried away, saying she should put her present carefully by, and then return and spend the morning, as they had agreed, quietly together. She ran up into her own room, and when there, pressed her uncle's gift lovingly to her bosom, and stood quite still, thinking over all he was to her. Upon her lips sat a tender smile, while her eyes were yet full of the tears which the sense of his kindness had brought into them. As she stood thus, pondering, the hand which held her new riding-whip gradually sank down by her side, and her eyes were

softly raised towards one of the windows, from which, through some trees, there was a glimpse of the river Arno, shining and sparkling in the sun's dazzling beams. Upon this object her gaze remained unconsciously fixed, and she continued lost in thought.

Unheeded of the lapse of time, she was only roused by hearing Mrs. Lindon coming to seek her. At the sound of the approaching step Kate started, hastily dried her eyes, put up the whip, and went out to meet and accompany Mrs. Lindon down stairs.

"Here is this tyrannical Olivier le Dain at her barberous work still! Tying up my limbs, amputating my liberty, cutting off my comforts and enjoyments," said Kate, as she returned to the sitting-room with her hand in a sling, which Mrs. Lindon had persuaded her to wear. "She prohibits drawing, and dooms me to sit still and enjoy myself, in this darkened, shady apartment, until the cool of the evening, when we are to drive out towards Val-lombrosa. Did you ever hear of such rigorous treatment? I've a great mind to rebel, as I used, when I was her docile pupil. Then, I made her yield to my whims; now, I give way to hers; and a sad life she leads me, in revenge for that which I once led her, I fear."

Mrs. Lindon shook her head, and smiled; while Cecil drew the couch forward for Kate, near to her uncle's arm-chair, by the chess-table; 'Squire Heathcote's modest dread that 'he hadn't head enough for the game,' having been overruled by Cecil's begging to be allowed to teach him, as a pleasant mode of passing their time together, when they should have nothing better to do.

"This is really most luxurious, and very delicious, considering that it's a prescription of Olivier le Dain's,—a pill that one's obliged to swallow," said Kate, settling herself cosily in her nook, close at her uncle's elbow. "Cecil, before you return to your seat, be so good as to raise the lower sun-blind, that we may have just a peep of the scene that I hate should be shut out entirely—it is so perfect."

She lay looking out upon the lovely Italian landscape, as if

she would enamel it upon her memory, in all its glow of vivid, burning colour.

There was a hush in the closely-screened room, that contrasted harmoniously with the noontide fervour outside, falling tranquilly and most gratefully upon the spirits of Kate Ireton. The silent chess-players; Mrs. Lindon quietly sewing; she herself absorbed in gazing.

"Kate looks as though she could be content to live in Italy for ever," said Mrs. Lindon's mild voice, at length.

"God forbid!" ejaculated the 'Squire. Then, recollecting himself, he added, "that is,—I mean, of course,—no offence to your favourite Italy, Mrs. Lindon. And, of course, so long as Kate's content, I am,—we all are, of course."

In spite of himself, the 'Squire ended with a little sigh. But he bent his eyes on the chess-board, returned to his game, and to the consideration of his next move.

The sigh did not escape Kate's ear. That, and his involuntary exclamation, delivered in the energy of his first feeling, opened her eyes to a secret. She saw that to please her, he tarried abroad; whilst, in fact, his heart was at home—at his own country hall, at his own favourite Heathcote—among all his old associates, and familiar pursuits. She wondered at her own blindness. She reproached herself with thoughtlessness—selfishness. That evening, as they drove home by starlight, she said, "Uncle, I thank you for my long, delightful, Italian holiday. When shall we return to England?"

"Whenever you please, darling," said her uncle, with a glad promptitude, which told Kate how truly she had divined his real feelings.

"Then next Monday, uncle, if you think fit, we will set forth."

And thus it was settled.

Cecil Lascelles accompanied them as far on their journey northwards as Genoa. There the friends parted company; he proceeding to Milan, the 'Squire and Kate to Nice, on their road home, with the mutual understanding that they were all to meet again that summer at Heathcote.

CHAPTER XXI.

UNCLE and niece were once more at Heathcote Hall. The 'Squire sat at his own hearth; his legs luxuriously stretched forth upon a thick, soft rug; his person basking in the full warmth of a blazing coal fire, that, sparkling and lambent, cast its cheerful, ruddy glow upon the bright fire-irons and polished steel fender, giving two-fold heat and brilliancy, thus mirrored and reflected.

It was an evening of the season called spring—in England so called as elsewhere. That is to say, the month was May. The evening was one of those, that seem as if winter had forgotten something, and had come back to look for it: in the process, freezing everybody into blankness and trembling, with the severe glance of his hard, cold, cruel eye; nipping all into frost and bitter restraint, by his icy breath, and sharp, rude touch. It was one of those evenings, raw, and chill, and piercing; with the sleet of February, the winds of March, the rains of April, making themselves felt in the air of early May. It neither snowed, blew, nor rained, actually; and yet there was an effect in the atmosphere, as of all three visitations.

Kate Ireton sat at the window; she had been loitering at one or other of the windows all day, in a kind of listless restlessness, as if she could not settle to anything, and as if she expected something that would not let her settle, in spite of her wish to do so, looking out into the park, and watching the trees of the avenue; noting how their budding leaves seemed chidden, afraid to come forth; and how their half-naked branches seemed to shiver in the keen air; and how watery and bleared the sky appeared, with its thin, grey, ragged clouds, scattered in disorder athwart its dreary expanse.

"This is comfort, indeed! True, cheerful, thorough, genuine English comfort!" exclaimed the 'Squire, as he put down the newspaper to gaze into the fire; the twilight having deepened too much to admit of his reading any longer.

Her uncle's words sounded to Kate like irony; but she glanced towards him, and understood how it was.

"Dear old England! dear old Heathcote! the true place for comfort and happiness, after all! I confess I'm a thorough Englishman in loving my home, and thinking there's no place like it. An't you glad we're come home, Kate?"

"Most glad," she replied, with so sincerely earnest a tone as to satisfy even his ear; for she was looking at him in his full content, and feeling how well that compensated.

"It's such a comfort to be able to have a fire, however late the season, without being thought a madman for ordering one," continued the 'Squire, leaning forward, and gently toasting the palms of his hands.

Kate's thought in reply was, "Ay, in a climate where one is needed;" but she kept it to herself, and looked musingly out into the dim, shrouded avenue again.

Presently she saw somewhat there, gradually shaping itself into the form of an advancing figure. She started up, then sat down again in the window-seat, and tried to master an odd choking sensation that came into her throat, amidst the thick beating of her heart. Then she heard her uncle's voice saying, through a sort of cloud that seemed to muffle her ears, "Come here, Kate, and try if you can make out the same thing that I do in the red-hot coal. I can exactly fancy I see the leaning tower at Pisa, as we saw it clear against the bright blue sky that morning. Do you remember?"

She moved towards his easy-chair, and knelt down upon a low hassock beside it, leaning against the arm, and was busily engaged trying to see, precisely in the midst of the fire, the shapes her uncle was describing, when the door opened, and Fernor Worthington came into the room.

He hurried towards them: "Dear 'Squire! Dear Kate! Dear, dear friends!" he said, in his deep, full tones, as he grasped a hand of each, and held them locked in his.

The meeting was perfectly English; there were few words uttered on either side; but there was that silent, earnest emo-

tion, visible in all three faces, so well understood by those who esteem each other, to speak all that need be said.

The 'Squire, in his cordial, good-hearted way, was least unable to express his joy; but even his usual flow of words when pleased, failed him now, and he was contented to shake Fermor's hand over and over, as he repeated his one sentence: "My dear boy! my dear Fermor! I am glad to see you!—I am glad to see you!"

Kate spoke no syllable; but she left her hand in the Iron Cousin's grasp, and forgot to say anything about its vice-like pinch.

"I would not let Robert announce me," said Fermor, after they had recovered from the first pause of meeting; "I knew I might come quietly in, and find you here together, and take my place between you, just as I used to be allowed to do in old times. And now that I am here, it seems, indeed, but yesterday, although so many weary months have passed since then!"

He had taken a seat by the 'Squire's side, Kate retaining her cushioned one on the rug, merely moving a little to make room for him; and while the 'Squire gently spoke of the loss Fermor had sustained, and affectionately consoled him with recalling how unselfishly and thoroughly he had performed his filial duty, Kate bent her eyes upon the fire, their expression betokening the sympathy she felt.

As Fermor listened to those kindly words, and looked upon the silent, but not unspeaking face before him, he thought he had never seen Kate look so beautiful, as now that her countenance was touched with a soft, sweet sadness; forgetting how often he had thought the same, when it was lighted up with animation, and sparkling with arch vivacity.

But Kate had, in fact, become handsomer. Her lineaments had acquired that finished proportion, that softness and refinement of outline, which the features of early youth and girlhood sometimes lack, during their growth to final perfection. Her complexion had attained a delicacy and purity, which detracted nothing from its brilliancy and bloom. Her figure had gained in height, and dignity of carriage, and fully-moulded shapeliness, without losing

its grace of ease, freedom of movement, and slender lightness. Her look had still its clear, transparent candour, with an added finer intelligence, and higher apprehension.

As the beautiful face continued its thoughtful gaze into the red embers, Fermor had full opportunity of noting its ripened perfections: she, sitting at their feet, while her uncle and cousin talked on, mournfully at first, gravely then, and, at length, trustfully, hopefully, cheerfully.

"And you have not told me your news, 'Squire," he said, as the conversation paused; "you have not told me how you liked your wanderings abroad; how you bore your absence from old England; how you tolerated foreign habits, relished foreign cookery, and found the foreigners themselves. As for Kate, I need not ask whether she enjoyed travelling. It is evident that her own prediction is fulfilled, and that she has brought back embellishment, without injury to the native gold. Italy has been rightly called a land of beauty, and seems to yield a crop that may be gathered and imported."

"While we have been rubbing off rusticity abroad, you seem to have been so fearful of rustivating at home, that you have employed your time in reviving your recollections of foreign compliment, to receive us suitably on our return," said Kate, glancing up at him; "and, pray, how does your eagerness to hear uncle's news sort with your coming here so late? We arrived yesterday. Is it possible 'Squire Heathcote's return caused so little sensation in the neighbourhood that you did not hear of his arrival for more than four-and-twenty hours after?"

"I heard it last night, and should have ridden over the first thing this morning, but that I had business to do which would not bear delay," he replied.

"Ah-ha! The Iron Cousin! 'Je te reconnais bien là, mon cher,' Monsieur le Fer!" she exclaimed, laughing. "'He says his name is Master Fer,' indeed, in that one little sentence, as truly as though he had uttered a dozen!"

"How you are running on, Kate! What do you mean? What are you talking about?" said her uncle, who was some-

times puzzled by her sudden mad-cap flights of allusion and illustration.

"Nothing, uncle; I am only amused to see how the bar to his coming, rang true metal upon proof. I guessed it was some such iron impediment that kept the Iron Cousin from coming to welcome us home, as—as he ought to have done."

"As he wished to have done—as he would have done—had not a less pleasant duty called for his first care. It was serious, it was of importance, or I should assuredly not have let it interfere with my strongest wish. But I have always found that I can enjoy the accomplishment of my wishes best when I have left nothing to reproach myself with, in their pursuit; and I could not have come to Heathcote to see you both, this morning, knowing I had neglected that which would have been neglected irretrievably, by my doing so. I could not have looked you both in the face, I could not have grasped hands, I could not have exchanged greetings with the free, unshackled soul, which such happiness should be tasted with, if—— But no matter for the cause; suffice it, it was impossible my coming this morning, as I desired."

"My dear fellow! you are only too good to give us this explanation," said the 'Squire. "I have no doubt your motive was a good one, and that you were quite right. All I have to say is, come when you will and can, you are always welcome here."

"'Right!'" echoed Kate; "of course he was. Who ever questioned the Iron Cousin's being quite 'right' in all he does; or, who ever questioned his 'right,' his perfect 'right,' to do as he thinks fit? Whatever he resolves upon, is sure to be 'wisest, virtuouslest, discreetest, best;' and he has undoubted title to perform it after his own supremely wise, virtuous, discreet, and best possible fashion."

"If the Iron Cousin is unchanged, plain-spoken, sarcastic Kate is no less so," remarked Fermor Worthington, in his own smiling tone.

"Would you have her changed?" she replied. "No, no;

we're both admirably well as we are; true to our respective qualities. You, a lump of impenetrable ore—sterling enough, perhaps, in its grim, sober, respectable way; I, blunt, odd, and, possibly, unpolished and rough too, in my way; just sufficient to prove my being of kin to the iron substance.”

“Ah, Fermor! how glad I am to be at home again!” said the 'Squire. “It was but a moment before you came in that I was saying to Kate, there's no place, after all, like dear old England!”

“For delectable weather—none, certainly,” said Kate, going towards the window, and looking out upon the dark, starless night. “The wind is rising. Hark! how it is whistling you to come forth and enjoy the zephyrs this fine May evening. The ride home to Worthington will be passing pleasant. Somewhat chill and moist, perhaps; the reverse of balmy. Nevertheless, a touch of distastefulness will but recommend it to the Iron Cousin. His nerves are braced against disagreeables: his preference lies that way.”

“Fermor, you won't think of returning to Worthington to-night? You will take a bed here, of course,” said the 'Squire.

“I wish I could,” returned Fermor; “but the fact is, the affair which rendered my presence necessary this morning, will require it again the first thing to-morrow, in order to complete what I want to achieve. I don't know why I should make a mystery of it nor do I wish to affect one—only——In short, there is a poor fellow whose trial is pending at the assize-town yonder, for poaching; and as I have every reason to believe him hardly dealt by, if not absolutely innocent of the charge brought against him by an oppressor and persevering enemy of his, I am determined to lose no chance of bringing him off, if, by my attendance in court, by my countenance and support there, and by aiding him in his defence, I can effect what I hope—his honourable acquittal.”

“My dear fellow!” said the Squire, “I'm heartily glad to find that you are beginning your career of country gentleman as

you ought; helping your poor neighbours, and taking an active part in looking into their grievances, and seeing 'em righted. Only be sure that they are in their rights."

"Oh, in a question of 'rights' and 'righting,' you may safely trust the Iron Cousin, uncle," said Kate.

"Yes, yes; I know," rejoined the 'Squire; "all I mean is, don't be led away by any romantic notions about poachers, Fermor, my boy! Depend on it, they're a bad lot—a very bad lot. Perhaps this fellow is only imposing on you, with a plausible story of his innocence. I always make it a rule to suspect a poacher of lying, or any enormity. If a chap will break into your preserves, and steal a bird, why not rob your house, or cut your throat? If he'll spring a hare, why shouldn't he commit any other baseness—cheat, thief, pilfer, or tell you a whining, pitiful tale of starving, and oppression, and persecution, and I know not what, which these fellows can always get up?"

"My dear 'Squire," said Fermor, with his grave smile, "I don't know that I'm prepared to go quite so far as you do, even supposing a man were convicted of being a poacher; but the one I speak of I firmly believe never committed this most heinous of offences in a sportsman's eye; although circumstances and presumptive evidence are so strongly against him, that it behoves me to try all in my power to have him cleared. I shall not rest till I do."

"You have my best wishes for a speedy rest, good cousin," said Kate. "Meantime I will retire to mine, while you ride forth into the bleak delights of this May night."

"And be sure you let us have the earliest news of what verdict you obtain," said the 'Squire. "We shall expect you over at Heathcote the first moment you can come. In all probability you will find an addition to our party. While we were abroad, I heard the news of aunt Mustley's death. I find she has left the bulk of her property, which was large, to our mutual connections, the Whites of Eggham Park. The old lady had a perfect right to do as she liked with her own, of course. But as it was always expected—I don't know how it came to be taken thus for

granted that the old gentlewoman would leave her money to me as her nephew, and nearest relation, I only know it was generally talked of among them as an understood thing—however, as this was always expected, upon finding that we were all mistaken, I thought it would be only right, and kind, and friendly,—just to show that I felt no grudge or jealousy against the Whites, poor things ! who were of course not to blame, if my aunt would leave them her fortune instead of me,—to invite them here for a visit on our return to England. We found a letter waiting for us on our arrival, to say that Mr. and Mrs. White were unable to leave home just at present, but that their daughter would be delighted to spend some time with us at Heathcote ; and that we might expect her on the fifth, which is the day after to-morrow. Being about Kate's age, she'll make a nice companion for her ; so I'm glad she's coming."

CHAPTER XXII.

MISS WHITE, attended by her maid, Dawson, reached the Hall on the day appointed. She brought another very amiable letter from her mamma, Mrs. White, repeating how much pleased she was that her daughter should have this opportunity of prosecuting an acquaintance with Miss Ireton, to whom Alicia, she said, had taken quite a fancy, when they met formerly. This, as Mrs. White knew it would, went straight to the heart of the 'Squire. The letter went on to say, that it was well to encourage friendships between young girls where the attachment was likely to be so mutually advantageous. This she thought extremely condescending, and would seem both candid and generous. Farther, the letter stated that, especially where ties of family connection bound the two parties, it was advisable that these intimacies should be fostered ; and that for her part she approved of promoting good understanding amongst kindred. There was one thing which the letter did not say, which was, that Mrs. White

was particularly glad that her daughter should be in the neighbourhood, and have frequent opportunities of meeting Fermor Worthington, Esq., of Worthington Court, whom she had long had in her eye as an eligible match. But this there was no need of mentioning. The letter was seconded by an affable message from Mr. White; while both letter and message were delivered with a pretty little speech from herself, by Miss White.

She had a recommendatory, ingratiatory way with her when she spoke, as if solicitous of favour, and seeking good opinion, at each word, look, or gesture. She was always dressed with extremest care, and had the air of being perpetually on her best behaviour. She was moderately pretty and passed for very pretty, by dint of letting it be understood that she was considered so, and by making her style of adornment proclaim her pretensions, answer to the assumed point, and aid as much as possible to rendering it a fact.

"My dear Miss Ireton,"—she began, the first time she and Kate were alone.

"Call me Kate," interrupted the latter; "the formality of surname is awkward among those who live in a house together."

"True, quite true; besides, it is so much more agreeable between friends; and I hope you and I shall become friends—quite friends—bosom friends—dear Kate. And you must call me Alicia. Well, but I was going to say,—what a delight it will be to me to see all your beautiful things that you've brought from abroad. You must show me all your lovely foreign fashions; and instruct my poor English ignorance in what it is proper to wear."

"I'm afraid I am a very bad authority in dress," said Kate. "You should be the adept, for your toilette looks to me—as far as I'm a judge—the perfection of good taste and elegance."

"Do you think so? You are very kind," replied Miss White, looking delighted. "Well, perhaps, so far, I am likely to be well dressed; for papa allows me unlimited expense in that article; and mamma deals with a London milliner, who visits Paris regularly every season."

"Then how could you talk of your 'English ignorance?'" said Kate.

Miss White looked a little disconcerted at this blunt question; but, as a less difficulty than finding a reply to it, she returned to another clause of the subject.

"Well, but you must not forget to show me all your beautiful knick-knacks."

"What beautiful knick-knacks?" said Kate.

"Why, your cameos, mosaics, or carved corals. You know what I mean; those thousand charming elegancies of curious jewellery, that every body brings with them from abroad,—from Italy, where I hear you've been."

"No, I really have none of these things you mention; not a single brooch or bracelet. My uncle more than once would have treated me to trinkets; but I knew that the holiday journey he was indulging me with must cost a great deal of money, so I would not let him buy me one bauble."

"You have great influence with your uncle, haven't you?" asked Alicia White, musingly.

"He is very good; he lets me do just as I like with him. Why do you ask?" answered Kate.

"Oh, nothing; I only meant—you use your power differently from what some girls would," replied Miss White. "Many would only think of getting the ornaments; you prevented their purchase. I admire your forbearance."

"There's nothing to admire," said Kate. "I don't care much for ornaments; and if I did, I should have thought it wrong to obtain them from uncle, when I knew they led him to spend more than he could perhaps well afford."

"That's an excellent way of thinking; and I feel quite proud that I may hope to form a friendship with one who has such charming principles," said Miss White, in her tone of blandishment.

"I believe I ought to say thank you, for making me such a pretty speech," said Kate, laughing. "But I fear I'm almost as ungrateful for pretty speeches, as I'm indifferent about trinkets. You must not waste them upon me, Alicia."

Miss White dealt in "pretty speeches;" she had quite a knack at making them, and delighted in receiving them; she would introduce them in the most ingenious way; devising little plots and plans for opportunities to bring them in herself, and laying little traps to obtain, if possible, a return in kind. She liked "pretty speeches;" they looked pretty in her, and sounded prettily from others. She had always a neat and appropriate stock of them on hand; and expected her associates to be equally well provided. She felt grateful and winning while she uttered them; gracious and gratified when they were responded to. She thought they wonderfully became her own small mouth; and were particularly pleasing from manlier ones; they sat smoothly on her lips, and sweetly tickled her ear. She fancied she looked especially well and amiable, so soft, so engaging, while mincing out her own "pretty speeches;" and was conscious of looking her best when languishingly listening and smiling to those in reply. She liked "pretty speeches" most with gentlemen; but she did not neglect them with women. She lavished them quite as frequently upon her own sex; feeling that they gave her a grace with the other. She considered a "a pretty speech" never thrown away; it either brought her ready payment, or gained her credit. She had either immediate interest for her outlay, or became interesting on the strength of it.

These favourite "pretty speeches" of Miss White, so far from finding favour with Kate Ireton, were peculiarly distasteful to her. Instead of charming, they always had the effect of irritating her. Instead of appearing winning and attractive, they acted repulsively. They seemed somehow to detract from Alicia's power of gaining upon her regard, rather than aid it in inspiring more. She felt as if they grated, inexplicably and inexpressibly, upon her wish to try and like the companion her uncle had chosen, sufficiently well for a friend. Whenever Alicia White made one of those "pretty speeches" Kate Ireton felt involuntarily repelled; and whenever she seemed to expect one from her, Kate was seized with a sudden incapability of uttering anything else than the most untoward reply, or an impossibility to get out a single word of any sort.

Breakfast was hardly over, the morning after Miss White's arrival at Heathcote Hall, when, as she was standing by the 'Squire's chair, expatiating on the beauties of his park, and casting her eyes towards it while she spoke, she suddenly exclaimed : — " Ah, here's young Mr. Worthington coming up the avenue I shall be so pleased to see him again. What a very superior young man he is ! "

" ' Superior ! ' To what ? To whom ? To all other young men, do you mean ? " said Kate.

" Well, perhaps I do, " said Miss White, looking down and playing with the tassels of her morning-dress. " At any rate, he's greatly superior to the common run of young men. But you mustn't tell him I say so. " .

" Certainly not, " said Kate, quietly.

Miss White looked rather blank, as if this were not exactly the reply she had expected.

When Fermor entered the room, Kate was struck with his appearance. She saw that he was a good deal altered ; that he looked thin and worn. What she had not noticed, by the uncertain glimmer of the fire-lit room, in the first excitement of meeting, she perceived now that she beheld him fully, in broad daylight. The sight of his black coat, too, moved her ; and after bidding him good morning, while her uncle presented him and Miss White to one another, she went over to the window-seat, and stood looking out.

Presently, she was joined by Alicia White ; Fermor remaining to talk with the 'Squire about the issue of the supposed poacher's trial, which had ended in undoubted proof of his innocence.

" How interesting young Mr. Worthington looks in his mourning for his father ! " said Miss White, in a lowered but sufficiently distinct tone, in which she was given to talk of people in their presence, half aside.

" ' Interesting ! ' That's an epithet for a young lady ! I should never have dreamed of applying it to the Iron Cousin ! " returned Kate

"And how pale he looks! Quite wan and wasted," continued Miss White. "He really should have advice. He has no one to take care of him, now; no mother,—no parent. I declare. I quite pity him. Don't you?"

"No; pity is not for the Iron Cousin."

"What makes you call young Mr. Worthington—at least, I shouldn't say 'young' Mr. Worthington any longer; he's Mr. Worthington now, poor fellow! since he's lost his father,—but what makes you call him by that odd name, Kate? So harsh; so ugly; so unfit."

"It's precisely because I think it so fit, that I call him by it," replied she.

"Nay, Kate, now you're joking. Surely, you can't think that gruff, plain, uncouth, ill-favoured title, a suitable one for him; a young man so handsome, so distinguished-looking; with such a noble air, such a——"

"You forget he's not deaf, in addition to his other personal advantages; and you're rather freely discussing them," interrupted Kate. "You'll offend him, or put him to the blush; and then you'll have to ask his pardon, which I should think would not be pleasant."

Miss White was silenced, for the moment. Presently she said:—"Kate, dear, where's your work-basket, or work-box, or whatever you use for your drawing-room work?"

"I have no drawing room work," she answered. "Sometimes I help Matty with her disagreeable useful work, as I call it,—work that must be done,—just the actual necessary house needle-work, making and mending, and so forth; or now and then, I knit a stout comforter for uncle's throat, or a pair of cuffs. But I do it at odd times,—only when I'm obliged; and I have no set work-table, or box, or basket."

"Oh, I can't do without my little bit of fancy work, I own," said Miss White. "It employs one's hands so agreeably. Therefore, I brought my box with me, that we might be quite notable and sociable. I'll ring, and desire them to tell Dawson to bring it for me, if you'll allow me."

"By all means," said Kate.

When the work-box was brought, it proved to be quite an elegant casket; of mother-o'-pearl, and silver inlaying, and ornamented finish. It was of fairy proportions; and had dainty little trays, filled with orderly rows of needles, of various kinds, and sizes, and degrees of slenderness and length, for knitting and netting—crotchet not being then in vogue. Smooth little ivory shuttles for tatting, curious little machines and devices for knotting, followed next. Star-shaped winders, with silks of every colour in the rainbow were there; and singularly enough, all quite full—not a thread displaced, not an end disturbed, not one begun. Supplies of new skeins were also there; equally unbroached,—in their original integrity. Underneath the whole, lay a little morsel of cambric, tacked upon an elaborate pattern of close French embroidery—which was begun, and only begun; from month to month, whoever had had the curiosity to inspect Miss White's box, that cambric worked collar would have been found precisely in the same stage of advancement. With the cambric work, lay a commenced purse,—that is to say, a few rows, with a few beads upon them, and a winder of silk, strung with more, ready for use. This, Miss White took out; and began knitting, with her white hands and slender fingers, in a proper attitude for showing them to the best advantage; just as Fermor Worthington, having finished his chat with the 'Squire, approached the table in the window-seat, where she and Kate Ireton were.

"Let me see what kind of a purse you have, Kate, dear," she said. "I dare say it is something very exquisite; some Parisian novelty or other. Let me look at it."

"Nay, it is only this grum, dingy, brown thing," said Kate laughing, as she produced an old-fashioned plain purse, that had evidently seen service. "It was one of Matty's knitting, to take abroad, as a keepsake from her. It went all my travels with me, therefore I've had rather an affection for it, and kept it disgracefully long in use on that account; but it really is worn out; and as my good nurse this morning replaced it by another, I must e'en

throw it away, not to shame her." And Kate emptied the contents into the new one, which she took from her pocket, throwing the other into a shred-basket that stood upon the table.

"I was going to offer to knit you one, Kate, dear; but I must not supersede Matty," said Miss White. "I think, Mr. Worthington, you must let me finish this purse for you," she added, turning with a captivating smile to Fermor. "It will give me an object for working hard to get it done."

"You are very good," he said, with his grave smile; "but I fear those bright colours and gay beads will be too smart for my wear. The grum brown would suit the Iron Cousin better, wouldn't it, Kate? I think I'll have it."

"It's old—it's full of holes," she said, laughing, as Fermor took up the discarded purse.

"You shall mend them for me," he said.

"I'm a very bad workwoman," she replied; "I should only cobble them up."

"Then cobble them up," he said.

"I shall never make a neat job of it; it'll never be worth anything," she said.

"No matter; take your needle and thread, when I bid you, and sew it up in the best way you can."

"Alter two words of your phrase, and I'll see what I can do," she returned. "Say silk, for 'thread;' and ask, for 'bid.' You men have no notion of anything but needle and *thread*, when stitchery is in question; and I've no notion of being *bidden*."

"The old dread of being ordered!" laughed Fermor.

"The old love of command!" retorted she, in the same tone.

"Will you take needle and silk, and do as I ask you?" he said, holding it towards her, and looking steadily and smilingly in her face.

"He is more absolute in his asking than his bidding," said Kate, as she took the purse from his hand, and turned to search for what she required; "just as ironly bent upon getting his own way, and no less determined not to be gainsaid."

"More undeniable and irresistible, because more persuasive," said Miss White.

"At any rate, he has made his demand in the prescribed words, and I must e'en abide by mine," said Kate, as she drew the holes together, and made the "grum brown" strong and whole if not very neat or sightly.

Just as this was achieved, an exclamation of surprise and pleasure from the 'Squire, caused them all to look up; and they saw, approaching the house, a gentleman on horseback,—a stranger to Fermor Worthington and to Alicia White,—but evidently none to Kate and her uncle, who both gave animated tokens of gratification. The 'Squire, followed by Kate, hurried out to receive the new comer in the hall, and meet him on his entrance.

"Is it possible? Here so soon! We did not expect you for at least a fortnight or three weeks! Can you have so soon tired of Venice? Arrived in England already!"

Such were the exclamations which reached the ears of those in the parlour, from uncle and niece at once; as they warmly welcomed the guest, who leaped from his horse with equal eagerness to greet them.

"Yes; I had a summons from my mother, which quickened my return. I am on my way to her now; but having received letters again since, saying there was no immediate hurry, and as Heathcote Hall lay in my road to Cheltenham, I could not resist the temptation of calling to shake hands with my 'co-mates in exile,' and learn how they had reached their own land."

"Well; quite well!" returned the 'Squire. "And now, let me introduce you to some friends of ours who are here. One of them you already know something of, by hearsay. The other is a fair lady, also related to us; so you will find yourself quite at home."

As Cecil Lascelles entered the parlour between the 'Squire and Kate, his frank, handsome face, and pleasant bearing, won prepossessingly and instantaneously upon those who were already there. Miss White rose, and graciously bent her head; while Fermor Worthington came forward, and in his quiet, but earnest, cordial manner, spoke a few courteous words to Cecil, that showed he was known to him through their mutual friend the 'Squire's

letters. Cecil was not slow to respond to his advance, in his own open, unaffected way; and as the 'Squire named the two young men to each other, adding: "My dear young friend and esteemed kinsman, Fermor Worthington," Cecil Lascelles turned with a gay look to Kate, and said: "Ah! the Iron Cousin?"

She replied with a smiling nod, and then introduced him to Alicia White, adding: "We are a family party, in short; and you will find yourself no less familiarly among us, than when we were all so snugly domesticated at Valetta—beautiful Valetta! We have, alas! no vines, no Val d'Arno, no Florence here; no sun, no blue sky, to offer you yet, but the latter may come in good time, when May shall have recollected itself, and remembered what it owes to its own reputation, and what, in every sense, is fairly to be expected."

"If we have no vines, we have stout English oaks to show you, Cecil, my boy; ay, and stout English hearts to welcome you with to them; and to all else that old England—merry England—may boast," said the 'Squire.

"Ay, and the oaks at Heathcote Hall, together with its master's heart, are among the best oaks and hearts in the county, nay, in broad England," said Miss White.

"You are very good, my dear," said the 'Squire, laughing; "we can show our young friend, too, that the county possesses its beauties, its toasts, its fair celebrities, as well as its fine trees, can't we? Eggham Park is within the same shire as Heathcote, I think."

Miss White's cherry mouth assumed an innocent simper, and said: "Oh! the trees in papa's park are very fine, I own; but the oaks at Heathcote, and the beeches at Worthington, are allowed by every one to surpass them."

"I shall hope to show you what attractions Worthington Court, as one of our antique country seats, may afford, worthy your notice," said Fermor to Cecil. "It is old-fashioned, and quaint; but, perhaps, those form its not least interesting features. Some of the trees are reputed to have been denizens of the soil before the Normans set foot upon it. We are famous for our

trees hereabouts, and cherish not a little pride respecting them but you must tell us of your glorious giant palms, plantains mangos, banyan-trees, and other Indian forest-kings, until you lower our island sylvan complacency to its due level and limit."

"Do not speak as if I were an alien," said Cecil laughing. "Though I am Indian born, I am English bred and nurtured. I am English in all my predilections—in all my prides and my prejudices, if you will."

"I will answer for it, you are a genuine Englishman, my dear boy!" said the 'Squire. "Nobody but an Englishman could have entered so thoroughly into my repugnance towards that impudent, grinning Florentine flower-wench, the first time you and I encountered each other. To this day, I feel thankful to you, for stepping forward to my relief. The hussey never molested me again. You stopped her effectually."

Cecil Lascelles laughed at the recollection which the 'Squire's words recalled. He saw again the perplexed look; the conflict between annoyance, and dislike of giving pain by rough repulse, all plainly legible in the good 'Squire's air. "By the bye, I think you and I did not make acquaintance that first evening, Kate, did we?" said he.

There was something smote oddly upon Fermor Worthington on hearing Cecil Lascelles address Kate Ireton thus, by her Christian name; and still more strangely, on hearing her reply easily: "No, Cecil; it was at the Pitti gallery, where you gave me up the chair you had inadvertently taken, not knowing it to be mine by right of daily possession and liking. I did not notice you that first evening; I was too deeply engaged listening, to perceive anything."

A moment's reflection told Fermor how this familiarity of appellation had grown out of their familiar position. Inmates under one roof, constantly associating together, it would have been stiff—almost absurd, to have preserved the distant "Mr." and "Miss," in addressing each other; they had naturally fallen into the more intimate title, as one better suited to their relative situation; and yet it grated upon his ear each time she used it.

Kate never called even himself by his Christian name, although related to her ; she always used the word "cousin," whenever she used any, in speaking to him. But most frequently she gave him no name at all.

He taxed himself with folly and unreasonableness, and smiled at his own susceptibility to have noticed such a circumstance ; nevertheless, it was some time before he could become habituated to its recurrence.

At first, too, when he beheld Cecil Lascelles so entirely at home with uncle and niece ; they, in turn, so at ease with him ; all three talking so animatedly and happily of things, persons, and scenes they had known in common ; it struck a little uncomfortably upon Fermor's heart. But his was too noble a nature to feel envy or resentment. He only felt regret that he could not have been abroad then with his friends, to share their pleasures and enjoyments, to partake their gratifications, and now to be able to understand their allusions, and sympathize with their reminiscences.

A feeling of mutual dislike between the two young men might have arisen out of these instinctive sensations existing on the part of one of them ; but Cecil was too frank-hearted, and Fermor too generous and high-minded, to entertain anything else than reciprocal esteem, each possessing so many good qualities to recommend him to the other's regard

CHAPTER XXIII.

"THE weather seems to promise propitiously," said Cecil ; "and I am anxious to make acquaintance with the woods of Heathcote. What say you, 'Squire ? Will you indulge me ? And do you think you can persuade the young ladies to accompany us in a ride through them, this April-faced May afternoon ?"

"A capital idea, Cecil. The way to put its doubtful dayship into good-humour, and bring out all its smiles, is to trust it. And

we will. Come, girls; on with your habits! Kate, bid them saddle Black Talbot for Alicia. Or, stay; perhaps Spanish Jenny will be better. You and I will take White Bess and Chestnut Phillis, as usual; while Fermor and Cecil will have their own nags."

"Dear 'Squire, pray let me have a quiet steed!" said Alicia White; "you know what a poor horsewoman I am. Black Talbot sounds formidably; and I hope Spinning Jenny—I think you called it—has no tricks, for I'm a terribly timid rider, you know."

"The mare has no claim to the giddy title you give her, Alicia," said Kate laughing. "Spanish Jenny, not Spinning Jenny: she's a pretty little Spanish jennet my uncle took a fancy to; and Ben Dimble hearing her called so, thought it her name—with a difference. She has been known among us, in consequence, as Spanish Jenny ever since. A more gentle, docile creature cannot be. Ambling Lambkin might be her appropriate title."

"Then she would not suit you, Kate," observed Cecil. "I know your style of riding of old. The feat, coming back from Fiesole, to wit! More like a knight of Rodenstein—the black huntsman, who rides the air, with his skeleton train by night, through German forests—than a sober, mortal young gentlewoman."

"Let my sins rest; they had their due share—and more than their due share—of chiding, at the time," she said, with a heightened colour. "By the way, Cecil, don't let me forget to show you my slip of the Valletta vine, which we brought safely to England with us, thanks to Mrs. Lindon's excellent contrivance in packing. It is planted in the green-house, and looks thrivingly, I assure you."

"My dear 'Squire! I depend upon you and Mr. Worthington to take care of me on horseback, or I can never venture," said Miss White; "I almost tremble at the thought already."

"We'll take good care of you, never fear!" said the 'Squire. 'Before you leave Heathcote, we shall have made you as fearless a horsewoman as my Kate."

"Oh! I never expect to reach Kate's perfection," said Miss

White; "though, if anything could inspire me with hope, it would be such tuition as yours; or give me courage, it would be such care as yours and Mr. Worthington's."

Miss White's pretty tremors and timidity contrived admirably to enlist the attention of her two chosen cavaliers during the ride. She appealed to them for protection; she turned to them constantly for fresh directions; she made such incessant little claims upon their interest and their assistance; she placed herself so confidently and so implicitly under their guidance, that they could do no other than afford it to her interesting helplessness.

By this means Kate was chiefly left to do the honours of her uncle's park to their guest. But the 'Squire's hearty eagerness and hospitality leading him frequently to join in the discussion of Heathcote's beauties, suggesting its finest points, and drawing Cecil's attention to its best views, caused him to lose sight of his duties as riding-master; so that the self-elected pupil fell almost wholly to the share of his coadjutor.

Fermor's courtesy would not allow of his neglecting the charge which thus devolved upon him; but he, in his own firm tranquil manner, ordered it so, that the conversation and consociation of the party were kept as general as possible. He eschewed all endeavours at special little by-talk, and eluded various small attempts at lingering behind the others. Someway, the adroit management found itself quietly counteracted and set aside, it hardly knew how, by the calm, manly will. Alicia White began to understand, in the course of that ride, why it was that Kate Ireton called Fermor Worthington her "Iron Cousin."

Upon one of these occasions, when, by his tacit arrangement, she found herself riding abreast with their companions all together, down one of the broad, grassy glades, and while under the influence of a slight feeling of peevishness at the imperturbability and self-possessed composure by which she felt herself unaccountably baffled and controlled, Alicia White turned from him, and said to Kate, "Why, my dear Kate, what a very lovely whip you have there! You told me you had brought no Italian

elegancies with you; and I am sure that is foreign workmanship. Such beautiful carving! such an exquisite design! How came you to say you had no beautiful knick-knacks from abroad?"

"I thought you spoke of trinkets—of jewellery,—of wearing-trinkets, I mean; you mentioned corals, cameos, mosaics; I really forgot this ivory-headed whip, which is certainly very beautiful. I ought to have shown it to you," returned Kate passing it across her uncle, who rode between them.

"Do you remember the day you brought it to Valletta, Cecil?" said the 'Squire, as he restored it to Kate, when Miss White had ecstasised and admired it sufficiently. "Do you remember what a broiling hot sun there was, though it was a good two months nearer winter than now; and yet what a pace you rode at? and how I—"

"March in Tuscany," interrupted Kate, while a bright colour mounted to her temples, "shames May in shivering England. Here are we, within a few weeks of Midsummer, right glad of a good canter to warm us. What say you, Cecil,—what say you all,—to a race to yonder knoll? Uncle, I'll wager you a silver penny, I reach there first. White Bess for merry England! Onward! Charge!"

Miss White uttered a small shuddering scream, crying, "Oh, no racing! no racing! I couldn't think of racing!" But Fer-mor Worthington, seizing her rein, and leading her rapidly on, exclaimed, "Trust to me! trust to Spanish Jenny! We'll bear you harmless!" They all darted forward in a compact body, making straight for the green rising ground, which Kate had appointed their goal.

The horses were well matched in strength and swiftness; and the riders kept for some time about evenly in advance. But just as they neared the knoll, White Bess gained visibly. Perhaps the 'Squire favoured his niece, and held back a little; but Cecil tried his best. Kate, however, was all but winner, when suddenly Spanish Jenny made a spring onward, and bore Miss White like the wind, lightly, easily, conqueringly, up the slope reaching the top first.

There was a general shout of congratulation, all laughingly begging Miss White never again to plead her bad horsemanship, while she, disclaiming, protesting, deprecating, but in a flutter of delight, assured them it was all Mr. Worthington's good management—that if it had not been for him, she should never have won the race; nay, she should never have attempted it; and that even now, she could not understand how it was effected; but believed that he must have used magic, for that he had kept close to her side,—that is, to Spanish Jenny's side,—who had all of a sudden bounded forward as if urged by an impulse she could not resist.

“I suspect it was no sorcery, nothing supernatural; but a most natural expedient for the Iron Cousin to apply,—a little quiet coercion,” laughed Kate.

“Just so,” replied Fermor. “A timely-applied fillip, that was all. I was willing that the pupil who did me the honour to appoint me one of her equerries, should do the 'Squire and myself credit on her first essay. I knew I might rely on Spanish Jenny's gentleness, that there should be no risk.”

“You were very good—very thoughtful and considerate—I cannot be too grateful to you, Mr. Worthington,” said Alicia White, with one of her softest glances.

“Nay, your gratitude is solely due to Spanish Jenny, who obeys a touch with the docility of ‘Ambling Lambkin,’ while she retains the spirit and fire of her Andalusian origin.”

Miss White was so elated with her equestrian triumph, that she made several little racing-matches between the 'Squire and herself, calling upon Fermor to abet and aid her, that she might secure more conquests; but he told her that since she had so incontestably proved her competency, her own skill and guidance were in future sufficient.

During one of these short courses, they came to an abrupt descent, at which Miss White drew back, and declared she should not venture such an exploit on her first day's trial, unless, indeed, Mr. Worthington would undertake to conduct her, and guarantee her from danger. Fermor showing no disposition to do either

the one or the other, Cecil said : " You should volunteer to take charge of your friend, Kate ; she would be perfectly safe under your wing. You have nothing to do but take her under it and fly down, as you did once upon a time, when you were so eager to recover that whip. Do you remember ? "

" Once for all, I forbid any revival of my scapegrace folly on that occasion, Cecil, which you are so fond of reminding me of. Let the motto be '*Requiescat in pace* ;' and on peril of my displeasure, make it '*Resurgam*,' " said Kate, with the same flush on her cheeks as before.

Fermor had noted it each time, and had observed, too, that it was evidently in connection with " that whip " which he had heard the 'Squire speak of as having been brought her by Cecil Lascelles. He had neither petty curiosity, nor paltry jealousy, where his friends were concerned ; but the colour in Kate's face struck him involuntarily.

By and by, as the riding party were turning homewards, the 'Squire, Cecil, and Alicia White, chancing to be a little in advance, Fermor Worthington asked Kate playfully, how far she had taken the Iron Cousin's whip, and what had become of it.

She answered by inquiring how long he had kept hers.

" I used it until it was likely to be spoiled," he replied. " The fact is, it was too slender for my hand, and one day it became injured, so I—— "

" So you very wisely threw the broken thing away," interrupted she. " Well, yours went with me as far as Florence, where it got tossed into the river one day, as a good-for-nothing worthless concern that had very nearly caused some mischief."

" What mischief, Kate ? Was it too heavy for you ? Did it hurt your hand ? "

" No—yes ;—yes, it occasioned me to hurt my hand—that is,—what does it signify ? It got flung into the Arno, and there's an end of it." concluded she, as she rode on to join the others.

"Kate will not hear of any sky but an Italian one, being worth looking at," the 'Squire was saying, as she came up; "and yet, for my part, I confess, I think there is much to be said on both sides. And I'm glad to find you think so, too, Cecil, my boy."

"Can Cecil be such a traitor to good taste as to allow that anything may be said in favour of an English sky in competition with that of Italy?" said Kate.

"Perhaps something might be alleged, as the 'Squire says, 'on both sides,'" laughed Cecil. "And yet, when we remember the glorious azure serene that reigns there perpetually, and think of what we have to bring against it, the task of saying anything in favour of our own 'grey vault' seems hopeless."

"Hopeless, indeed!" cried Kate. "What! compare this pale, dim, speckled canopy—scarcely to be called blue, and not worthy the name of sky, still less, of heaven—with that grand deep colour, that glow of sunlight, that constant cloudless expanse, in which everything looks doubly clear and trebly fair?"

"It is that very constancy of blue clearness, which, if I may venture to say so, makes rather against it with me," said the 'Squire. "Day after day to see no rain, no cloud, no shadow, no hint of change or varying weather, becomes, I own, a little tiresome to me, after a time."

"True British taste, dear uncle!" she exclaimed. "I used to say, that when there was such a thing, by a wondrous chance, as a rainy day in Florence, we were sure to see all the English people out of doors, umbrella in hand, walking happily about, then truly enjoying themselves, and—the weather. They felt quite at home—really comfortable."

"But you know, my dear, I am a Briton,—a true Briton; consequently British in my tastes. And I'm afraid—no, not afraid—but, I think, I shall never be anything else," replied the 'Squire.

"Why should you, my dear sir?" said Fermor Worthington. "The taste which can find something,—nay, much,—to admire

in our island sky, is not a taste to regret. Is there nothing in a dappled dawn, flecked with light touches of rose and gold? Is there nothing in a fresh dewy day-spring, with fleecy clouds tenderly veiling the coy smiling eyes of morn? Is there nothing of beauty in a breezy, bracing forenoon, with its winds tossing and bowing the heads of old trees, and its gentler kiss touching the tops of grass meadows and corn-fields, transmuting them into waves of earth; while mottled, swift-gliding clouds sweep athwart the uplands, with passing gloom, to make all seem brighter and cheerfuller the next moment? Surely, there is something to be said 'on both sides,' 'Squire; and let us be quite certain ours is the worst side, ere we give it up too lightly, or too ungratefully."

"Thank you, my dear boy, for finding out what there is to say on our side, so much better than I could have done," returned the 'Squire. "Well, Kate, what think you now? English sky is not so utterly despicable, after all, you see! Is there not some justice in what Fermor says?"

"There is always justice in what the Iron Cousin says," she replied, laughing. "He deals in justice; he abounds in justice. Justice is his strength, his stronghold. If he had only a grain more just and reasonable allowance of justice, he might set up for a Justice of the Peace."

"I think there's not only a great deal of justice in what Mr Worthington has just said——"

"Or justly said," interrupted Kate.

"Has just now said, I mean," continued Miss White; "not only much justice, but much beauty of description, and much truth."

"Truth is another of the Iron Cousin's commodities. He can supply you with any amount," said Kate.

"That savours of manufactured stuff,—forthcoming on demand," smiled Fermor.

"Nay, no one will suspect you of anything but the plain, genuine, unadulterated article," she returned. "Pure, tasteless Truth, straight from the bottom of its own profound well."

"Tasteless, but not distasteful, I hope," he rejoined.

"'Tasteless' was my word; and tasteless may mean unaroury, insipid, unpalatable, mawkish, flavourless, disrelishing and distasteful,—or, limpid, clear, transparently devoid of all objectionable and offensive matter,—whichever sense you please to affix to it," she replied.

"Rather, which sense it is *your* pleasure to affix, Kate," he answered. "You must give the meaning to your own word."

"I am not a glossary," laughed she.

"You must know your own meaning, then," said Fermor.

"That I do, strange to say, although I am a woman," she returned. "But knowing it, and giving it, are two; and I am not aware that I am bound to do either—for all your stringent 'must'—no less absolute and peremptory than Coriolanus's 'shall.'"

"Mr. Worthington is very forbearing, to suffer you to treat him in that unceremonious style, Kate," said Alicia White.

"Oh, we made a compact when we first met, as boy and girl, to banish all ceremony between us," replied Kate. "And as for 'suffering' me to treat him as I please, what suffering can there be to an Iron Cousin? Cuffs and thumps would make no impression. How should words have any effect?"

"Words sometimes penetrate and wound, where blows fail," smiled Fermor. "A box of the ear from fair lady's hand, might be received as flattery and favour, while a sharp speech from her tongue shall pierce like barbed arrow, or adder's fork."

"To deal a gentleman a box on the ear, or to make him a rude speech, seems almost equally unfitted for feminine usage, I think," said Alicia White.

"One befits her hand, the other the mouth, there's all the difference," said Kate.

"Are they befitting either, or befitting at all?" asked Fermor.

"Perhaps not," she replied, laughing. "But they seem mar-

vellously pat to each, when provocation occurs. All I have therefore to do is, to pray heartily against temptation. I should be sorely grieved to find myself betrayed into such a position as to need either, in good earnest, and for self-defence. Attack is another matter. To carry rout and confusion into your adversary's camp, when he's least dreaming of assault, is glorious. It leads to a skirmish, a trial of arms, a skill-encounter—nothing more."

"A mock-fight, in short; no real enmity, eh, Kate?" said Fermor.

"Exactly so," she replied.

"Well," said Cecil Lascelles, as the party drew bridle in front of the old Hall, on their return, "Miss White's eulogium upon your Heathcote trees, 'Squire, led me to expect some glorious specimens of English Dryad divinity; but this first introduction into their haunts, makes me think her praise cold, and only such as could be the result of mortal jealousy. I shall not care how long I stay here, to prove her wanting in due panegyric upon her sister beauties of the woods."

"To-morrow, we will take you a still finer and longer ride,—over to Oakleigh Hill, my boy," returned the 'Squire. "From the high ground there, we have a glorious view of the country, for miles in extent."

CHAPTER XXIV.

BUT to-morrow ushered in other plans, and other thoughts. The post-bag—always appearing during the morning meal at Heathcote Hall from time immemorial, opened then, and its contents distributed among those seated around the breakfast-table, by the hand of the master of the house himself,—brought a letter to Cecil Lascelles from his mother.

It announced that Lady Diana Freseley had died quite sud-

denly That, contrary to all expectation, her ladyship, after wonderfully rallying since a recent attack of illness, had had a relapse, which carried her off in a few hours. That the shock had left Mrs. Lascelles so overwhelmed, she felt, for the moment, incapable of thinking or acting, and begged her son would hasten to her without delay.

Cecil lost no time in repairing to Cheltenham ; but he found his mother already much restored to her usual self, and full of fresh plans.

Her whole soul was wrapped in her son, Cecil ; her darling desire was to promote his welfare,—that is, his prosperity, his fortunes, his position in the world. Her life was devoted to this one aim ; all her faculties were knit to its accomplishment. Her thoughts, night and day, occupied themselves with this single idea, to the exclusion of every other ; so that the very concentration and intensity of her solicitude defeated its own object, rendering her unobservant of much that might have assisted her in her design. She saw nothing that militated against her hopes, she perceived nothing that interfered with her projects. She did not even see clearly the end itself ; for in believing that she secured every thing, by securing Cecil's prosperity, she made the mistake of supposing prosperity all in all with him. In blindly pursuing this point solely, she sacrificed most else,—and far higher than itself. She lost the present enjoyment of her son's society, engrossed in devices for his future benefit ; she neglected his and her own comfort, and their content in mutual association, their intercourse of affection, while busied in weaving and following out ambitious schemes, which, if realized, would not procure that which was the drift of all her plans,—his happiness. The confidence between mother and son, that might have been a means of enlightening her as to the error she made, was, by the very absorbedness and eagerness of her pursuit, prevented from acquiring its due growth. Cecil knew but vaguely of his mother's plans for him : she, instinctively feeling that they would gain but little comprehension or approval from one of his frank nature ; and he, caring little for them, saving as they amused

and interested her. She had set her heart upon obtaining the large sum, which her maiden aunt had to bequeath, for Cecil; but Lady Diana, when her will was opened, was found to have left the whole of her property to the endowment of an alms-house for decayed spinster gentlewomen.

This defeat of one of her favourite schemes, had not destroyed Mrs. Lascelles' faith in their power to effect her object. The first blow of disappointment over, she turned her thoughts to her other cherished project, which was to gain her brother the Earl of Wrexham's powerful patronage and influence on Cecil's behalf, in procuring him a lucrative appointment either at home or abroad.

Cecil and his mother quitted Cheltenham for Castle Wrexham; the young man writing the 'Squire word not to be surprised if he saw him soon back again, as he did not intend giving up his promised summer holiday at Heathcote. About the same period, Alicia White was summoned home by her parents, to receive her godmother, Lady Niggle, who had come rather unexpectedly to spend a week or two at Eggham Park, although Mr. and Mrs. White promised the 'Squire in their letter, that their daughter should return to Heathcote Hall and complete her visit, so soon as the venerable lady should have taken her departure.

Thus left alone, the uncle and niece fell into their old home habits. They once more rambled abroad on horseback together the principal part of the day, or the 'Squire rode out with his brother sportsmen, while Kate pursued her own devices at home. She no longer felt the time hang wearisomely or monotonously; there was now no want of intellectual resource in her existence. She had acquired a thirst for learning, and knew the sweet delights of its deep refreshing draughts, of its pure full enjoyment. She had learned the infinite joys to be derived from a loving worship of art, and the pleasures of its assiduous study. Mrs. Lindon's patient, careful teaching, less conveyed by set precept than by earnest inculcation and inducement, with enthusiastic example, had produced its impression; had prepared her mind to seek its own

aliment, and had inspired the desire of self-culture. She was no sooner at leisure to follow her own inclinations undisturbed, than she gave herself up to the luxury of solitary diligence,—that profound source of pleasure to the genuine lover of knowledge. No one but the true searcher after its stores, the ardent reader, can understand the delight with which she shut herself into the well-filled library, secure for many hours of uninvaded quiet. No one but the devoted worshipper of art, who knows how humblest attempt at labouring in the practical portion of the glorious mystery, is sought as a means of raising the mind to a fuller comprehension of its perfection, can appreciate the happiness with which Kate set about constructing a little den of her own, where she might copy, and sketch, and daub, and rub out, and dab in, and paint, and repaint, to her heart's content, for a whole morning, without chance of interruption. There was a small room at the top of the house, remote from the resort of servants,—in a range of apartments little used save as lumber-rooms, filled with odds and ends of discarded furniture, and despised old pictures—which commanded an extensive view of the fine park, its trees, its green glades, its noble avenue. In this little room Kate took up her quarters, as her own especial studio and painting-den. She brought there her brushes, paints, palettes, portfolios, crayons, water-colours, and all the hundred-hued materials, that seem so insignificant to others, so invaluable to the artist. Among the old pictures that had so long mouldered in dusty disgrace and obscurity here, she chose out a few that she found something to like in; and these she hung up, together with some of her own favourite sketches, mostly reminiscences of those pictures in Italy she had best admired, and of which ever so faint and distant a trace was something to possess. She would have liked to have brought here one other chattel of hers, but there was no room for it. This was an old harpsicord, which she had discovered in some out-of-the-way corner of the house, and which, upon her return from abroad, she had begged her uncle to have put in order and tuned for her. However, upon finding that she could not, by any contrivance, get space for it in her den, she had it carried into her own dressing-

room, which chanced to be in a thick-walled angle of the old house from whence no sound could be distinguished, and where she felt she could thrum and warble away without a soul being the wiser. In one or other of these three secluded nooks, Kate would ensconce herself, whenever she felt secure of her uncle's absence, for the best part of a day. But she never indulged in their absorbing delights, so long as there was a chance of his requiring her companionship. Once or twice that he had found her in the library, lost in some favourite volume, he had pished and pshawed, muttered an angry "Those confounded books!" or looked so involuntarily chagrined and disconcerted, while he strove to repress the tokens of his disappointment, that she resolved never to risk letting them interfere with his comforts, his pleasure in her society. She took care so to time her pursuits, that she was always ready to ride, or walk, or sit with him; and only prosecuted her happy self-teaching when perfectly sure that he was engaged elsewhere, and could not need her. This unselfish proceeding, like all unselfishness, brought its own reward. She enjoyed her liberty none the less for having earned it by generosity and self-denial; while its rarity, and snatched joy, enhanced its sweetness and relish.

One morning that her uncle had ridden over to see a neighbour at some few miles distance, she was comfortably shut in her den, and giving herself up to the thorough anticipation of an unbroken forenoon, had become engrossed with a copy she was attempting of Correggio's Mother and Child in the Florence Tribune, by the help of an engraving and her own memory of the original. As she worked on, the colours seemed to glow upon the print, so vividly did she recall them; so perfectly did she behold that gentle rapturous face, that bending form, those playful, loving hands, clapping a soft merriment for the gladding of the up-turned baby eyes. She was so immersed in her recollections, and so intent upon the endeavour to transfer them upon the canvas, that she did not hear a quick firm step which approached through the range of deserted rooms. It was only the opening of the door which caused her to look up and behold Fermor Worthington.

She started, and coloured with mingled surprise and vexation.

"How came you hither? How came they to let you find your way here? My uncle is out,—they have orders to show visitors into the sitting-room," she said, rising precipitately.

"But I am not a visitor, Kate," smiled Fermor. "I have long been accustomed to the privilege of dispensing with the ceremony of being announced; and find my way about the house, wherever you and the 'Squire may chance to be."

"Not here, not here—no one comes here," she said hastily.

"Why not here? It is not a Blue Beard chamber, is it?" said Fermor, looking round.

"No one comes here without my knowledge,—without my permission," she returned, biting her lip.

"Then give me your permission now," he said.

"And why, pray? Why should I make an exception in your favour? I allow no one to come here—not even Matty. Nobody ventures to invade my den."

"But since I have dared its terrors, and sought you in it, will you not grant me the reward of my courage?" he asked.

"Courage of impudence—of audacity—of——"

"Of boldness," he said. "I boldly made my way to your retreat, and deserve right of entrance for my pains."

"Or rather, exclusion in return for intrusion," she replied.

"'Intrusion,' Kate! But you are not serious?"

"I don't know that; I am quite serious in disliking to be broken in upon when I mean to be alone. Uncle is gone out, and I had fully intended to indulge in a quiet morning by myself," she returned.

"A tolerably broad hint for a visitor," laughed Fermor; "but I have claimed to be none, therefore I must brook the freedom which is reserved for intimates. I suppose I ought to take that as a plain, straightforward dismissal; but if you have made up your mind for a quiet morning at home by yourself, I have equally made up mine for a pleasant morning at Heathcote; and it is now merely a question whether you or I are to give up our wish."

"Oh, of course, the Iron Cousin's will is to carry the day; it

always does prevail,—it always is to prevail; all other things are bound to submit to its domination, now, and henceforth."

"May you be a true prophetess, Kate, so long as it shall not be unreasonable or unjust in its domination."

"So long as its domination does not exceed reason, you mean: agreed," she replied.

"And now tell me why you deem it reasonable or needful, to guard your den, as you call it, so jealously," said Fermor. "One would think it were a witch's cave, a wizard's cell, some dire scene for 'a deed without a name,' instead of a pleasant, cheerful little snuggerly. You looked as though you had been caught in some unholy act, some unlawful pursuit; whereas I can see nothing more fatal than a few sketches, crayons, and colours—no very deadly implements."

"You forget that a snuggerly implies peace, seclusion, retirement; not liability to—to—intrusion," she said.

"'Intrusion' again, Kate! Tell me frankly, and in so many words, that I indeed intrude, and I am gone."

"Tell me first your candid interpretation of the word 'snuggerly,'" she answered.

"A snuggerly is a good place for one who wants to sulk in comfort; but a better for two, who wish to be happily sociable," returned Fermor.

"Come, your definition shall procure you what your pleaded boldness could not," said Kate.

"Right of entrance; that was what I claimed as the recompense of my courage in seeking you out, and invading your quiet territory. Let me share it with you, and enjoy some of its tranquil beauties. What a grand view it commands! The windows below have nothing comparable with this!"

He stood gazing out for a few minutes, in mute enjoyment of the fine natural picture, and then he turned to the one upon the easel.

"Ah, when you think of the original, how cold, how poor it seems! How presumptuous the bare attempt to retrace it in the same materials! Almost better to content oneself with the im-

pression that is painted on the memory ! ” said Kate, as she saw his eyes fall upon the Correggio sketch. Never had her efforts appeared to her so bald, so wretchedly short-coming.

“ No attempt deserves the name of presumption that is made in the spirit of loving admiration, and modest faithful endeavour,” said Fermor ; “ it is only one form—and perhaps the most fervent form—of homage. It is a voluntary submission to the chance of failure, for the sake of proving to our utmost the sincerity of the worship that is in us.”

“ The disgrace of failure is certainly one of the cruellest mortifications our humility could devise as its test,” she rejoined.

“ It is scarce disgrace to fail in such high-reaching endeavours ; better to fail in a noble ambition than triumph in a paltry aim,” he said.

“ Better to fail copying Correggio, you mean, than succeed in rendering correctly a miserable daub ? ” said Kate, as she looked ruefully at her morning’s work.

“ I do,” he returned. “ In the one, there may be imperfection, insufficient power, inadequate performance ; but there is, through all, recognizable the wish to reproduce excellence, the desire to represent what the soul acknowledges to be beauty : in the other, there is nothing but sorry mediocrity throughout.”

“ What else, alas ! but imperfection, insufficient power, inadequate performance is there in all here ? ” said Kate, with the same expression in her eye, as she glanced at all the sketches lying about, and hung around ; “ after all, it is woful loss of time ; but it is pleasant, too,” she added, half sadly, half laughingly.

“ To be sure it is pleasant ; and no loss of time, if it be but to essay our patience and fortitude in bearing the discovery that our skill is less than our poetry of imagination and conception. But you say, what is there here other than imperfection, insufficiency, inadequacy ? I see much of industry ; vigorous, hearty endeavour, and true feeling : rough, unequal they may be—promises of future improvement, perhaps, rather than actually good performances—but still worth something, as proof of meritorious, honourable, strenuous attempt.”

He had taken up one of the sketches that lay there, and held it in his hand as he spoke, and surveyed the rest between whiles.

“ ‘Worth something as trials of temper, and evidences of diligence; a kind of moral lesson in daubery,’ ” she said, laughing a little bitterly. “Very praiseworthy painting; highly laudable limning. This is a most consoling view of Artolatry. Quite an iron-cousin view of the subject.”

“What so enhances the delight of intellectual enjoyments as associating a moral purpose with their pursuit?” he returned. “If, while correcting and improving our draughtsmanship, we can at the same time correct and improve our dispositions, is it not a double gain? If, while learning to estimate, and endeavouring to imitate, the choice execution and rare artistic beauty of a picture, we also elevate our natures, with the contemplation and comprehension of still nobler and higher things to be discerned in the compositions of the great masters, are we not wisely uniting spiritual with intelligential culture? In the attempt to put down and trace out our own ideas, too, there may be scope for feeling and sentiment, no less than mere thought of lines and colours, or the testing our powers of original invention. In this little sketch, for instance—slight and hasty as it is—there is evidence of fancy, and taste, with a keen eye for nature and truth, guided as much by liking as perception.”

“What have you there?” she said, looking over his shoulder at the sketch he held, and examined with much interest.

“It contains an admirable likeness of your uncle, notwithstanding the figure is so lightly dashed in; it is a spirited drawing altogether, though so mere a sketch,” replied Fermor, continuing to gaze upon it.

“Ah, I remember!” she said, as she stood beside him, lost in thought, her eyes fixed upon the picture.

It was a small chalk drawing, with a few touches of colour; but the whole effect was vivid and graphic. The ‘Squire’s figure was—as Fermor Worthington said—most strikingly rendered. The grey head; the florid, healthful cheek; the simple, good-

hearted expression ; the hardy and vigorous, yet gentlemanly—because perfectly easy and natural—bearing of the whole frame, were precisely given. Opposite to him sat Cecil Lascelles—his frank, open countenance hardly less unmistakeably depicted than the 'Squire's ; while both were represented engaged in a game of chess. Near to them sat a female figure, in whose placid look, and tranquil attitude, bending over some needle-work, Fermor had no difficulty in recognizing Mrs. Lindon. Immediately behind her uncle was Kate herself, half reclined upon a couch, her face turned towards a raised sunblind, which gave a glimpse of a glowing outdoor landscape.

Now, as she stood there, looking upon the miniature transcript of a scene so well remembered, Kate Ireton gave herself up to the luxurious memories it awakened ; her imagination busily employing itself in re-tracing every particular of that enchanting spot. Again she saw the clustering vines, with the golden light streaming through them ; the brilliant green of the rich-tufted orange-trees ; the mellow silvery hue of olives ; the glorious over-arching blue of the sky, embracing all with its celestial span. As Fermor and she hung over the drawing, close together, his breath almost felt among the hair that veiled her cheek, Kate yielded to a sense of deep unaccountable pleasure that stole over her ; an emotion of gentle, happy, inward delight, such as she had never before experienced. It seemed to pervade her entire being, and hold her there entranced.

Unconsciously she submitted to the spell for some moments, then she suddenly drew away, saying in a soft undertone : "Beautiful, beautiful Italy."

She stood at the window, looking out ; when Fermor Worthington said : " You have a very fond feeling towards Italy, Kate."

" Very ! " she exclaimed, with fervour.

" Come and read me this Italian picture," he said.

" Cannot you read it ? " she returned.

" I understand its characters—I must be dull, indeed, not to distinguish those at once ; but I should like to know their meaning—the history they make."

"A picture is worth nothing if it do not tell its own story," she replied. "Come, we have had enough of pictorial studies, let us take a ride this fine morning. 'Tis an affront to English May to slight her rare smiles of warmth and sunshine. Where shall we go?"

"Wherever you please. But, first, let me make out all I can of the drawing that most pleases me here," he said, still looking earnestly at it. "It is really a beautiful sketch. It tells its own tale clearly enough; I know not why I should ask further explanation."

Yet still he lingered.

"Kate, come and tell me what you intended by this," presently he said.

"Not I," she replied. "If you are willing to ride with me, well; if not, I leave you to the undisturbed enjoyment of the den."

"Nay, I have no such exclusive fancy for it," said Fermor, following her at once from the room; "it is you, Kate, who have a churlish taste for having it all to yourself."

"And this is my reward for letting you stay here so long," she returned. "But have a care how you trespass again. Since reproach is all I gain by my foolish sufferance I shall bolt the Iron Cousin out next time he attempts to invade my snuggerly, and be rock to his entreaties."

"Iron shall prevail against stone or flint," smiled Fermor.

"Adamant is harder than iron," retorted Kate.

"Beware I do not answer, in words I have met with somewhere or other: 'You draw me, you hard-hearted adamant, but yet you draw not iron,'" said Fermor, laughing. "The Iron Cousin may determine to resist the attraction, and stay away from the den and its adamantine occupant altogether."

"That would be just what I desire," she replied; "and thus I obtain my wish of keeping all intruders away. But now, once more, which way shall we go?"

"Let the horses decide," said Fermor; "we will leave it to their discrimination to guide us; they can scarcely lead amiss, where all is so choicely beautiful."

"I asked you to select our ride; don't show yourself less capable of decision than a horse, lest I think you—lest you prove yourself an inferior animal," said Kate.

"An ass?" laughed Fermor.

"Nay, I give you the whole range of inferior creation to appoint your own class from among; and meanwhile repeat my request that you will determine the course of our ride."

"Then, if you have no objection, we will let it be towards the village," he replied. "Sir Dullarton Ditchley begged me, the first time I should be passing in that neighbourhood, to call and pay his subscription to the National School-house, which has lately been established there; and I shall be glad of the opportunity to accomplish my commission."

"And, pray, why does the lord of Ditchley manor depute you to perform his errands?" said Kate, somewhat haughtily. "The master of Worthington Court should needs be too proud to execute any man's behests when they can be done as well by himself."

"But this is not the case," said Fermor. "He cannot leave his own house. He is laid up with the gout, and all but bed-ridden; therefore, I have undertaken to see his charitable desire carried out for him. Poor man! He has few pleasant thoughts to keep him company in his illness; his squandered life has left him scarce any. I am glad to help him to a wholesome pleasure or two; and the notion that he may lay out some of his superfluous pounds in the forwarding a good cause, has proved a fortunate suggestion. He is as pleased as a child, with his new fancy for playing the patron and benefactor. Better that than playing the fool—betting, jockeying, ducking-and-draking his money on the turf or at the gaming-table."

"And you are accepting the part of Mentor to this venerable Telemachus? Forming his youth—or reforming his age," remarked Kate.

"Helping an old friend of my father's to a few wise and useful deeds, which may replace for him his uncomfortable reflections on past, less fruitful ones," said Fermor.

Kate knew by experience that when Fermor Worthington used his father's name, it was no time for her to persist in a light,—far less, a disrespectful tone. She forebore, therefore, and held her peace; and they rode on for some time in silence.

CHAPTER XXV.

"AND so you are actually taking me to school, after having so long been in the habit of schooling me yourself?" said Kate, as they approached a small plain building, lately erected at the entrance of the village. "It looks like a Methodist meeting, quite ugly enough to suit those who think beauty an offence to Heaven."

"It has been built at the very least cost consistent with actual usefulness and solidity," replied Fermor. "The object was to have a weather-proof room, capable of holding as many of the poor children hereabouts, as had parents anxious to give them that education which they themselves could not afford to provide. It is suited to its purpose; convenient, sufficiently spacious, airy, and clean."

"Do you call this place airy, clean, convenient, sufficiently spacious?" whispered Kate to Fermor, as they found themselves in the closely-packed school-room, thronging with ranges of up-turned faces that curiously scanned the visitors, and ringing with the hum of voices conning or repeating lessons; "I should have thought it a stifling, noisy, bewildering hole—full of the reek of many breaths, the effluvia of stuff frocks, the aroma of checked aprons, coarse linen caps and tippets, book-bags, dinner-bags, straw bonnets, leather shoes, and woollen mittens! In short, that delectable, conglomerated perfume, known expressively as 'a poor smell.'"

Kate involuntarily put her handkerchief to her mouth, to escape inhaling the atmosphere which struck her senses so oppressively, coming from the pure outer air.

"Do not hurt their feelings, Kate. Control your disgust, while you stay; it will not be long," said Fermor, as they waited until the head-mistress, or monitress, as she was called, should be ready to attend him. This monitress was a sour-looking, unrelentingly-orderly sort of woman, who seemed as if determined to show her independence of the gentlefolks, and to make their leisure attend upon her duty. She seemed intent upon making a parade of her duty; of showing how paramount it was with her to every other consideration. She seemed to take a pleasure in keeping them standing there, in the entrance, waiting, until she should have fully despatched the task she had in hand.

"What an odious, lemon-faced woman that is!" said Kate. "Her aspect is enough to curdle what milk lingers on the lips of these youngest chits, who seem scarce more than babies, some of them, poor little wretches! I suppose this is an Infant School, as well as National School?"

"They refuse none here, however young, whose mothers can neither keep nursemaids, nor afford to play nursemaid themselves," replied Fermor Worthington. "If that woman's look be tart enough to turn a whole tribe of little whey-faces, yonder meek girl is so sweet-looking as to sugar the most acid draught of rebuke, and soften the bitterest task, the other could inflict or impose."

"You call her sweet-looking!" exclaimed Kate, still in the lowered tone in which the whole colloquy between the cousins had proceeded; though the busy hum that prevailed sufficiently drowned what they said. "Why, she is as pale as a ghost; she has dark rings round her eyes; she stoops, and one shoulder is higher than the other."

"I am speaking of the expression of her face," replied Fermor. "It is positively beautiful. So mild, so gentle, so touchingly and truly *good*."

"I see nothing beautiful in her," retorted Kate, putting up her lip. "If I spoke the honest truth—which I generally do—I should say she is more than plain; ugly, absolutely ugly. She is all but deformed; and her face has that sickly, drawn look,

which spoils the best set of features, were her's ever so fine,—which they are not."

"No, the features—the complexion—are, as you say, faulty; but I maintain, that the expression is one of the very loveliest I ever saw," said Fermor, looking earnestly at the young girl, who was leaning over one of the children that stood at her knee and patiently trying to make it understand something she was explaining; "it has the soft, absorbed gaze, the tender sweetness and devotion, with self-abnegation and self-unconsciousness of one of Raffaele's Saints, or Virgin-mothers."

"I can see nothing beyond a quiet, common-place-looking English girl, for my part," said Kate. "Who is she?"

"The sub-monitress, I believe," answered Fermor. "She seems as admirably suited to her office, as that harsh, morose-looking 'lemon-face' is unfit. When will she condescend to come and receive the amount I have to pay over to her, I wonder?" added he, as he took out his purse. "Go, my dear," he continued, to one of the nearest children; "go and tell your schoolmistress that there is a gentleman who wishes to speak to her, and pay some money into her hands."

"So you have actually adopted the 'grum brown,'" said Kate, laughing, as she chanced to observe the purse Fermor held. "That is carrying pertinacity to a pitch of which I did not think even the Iron Cousin capable! Because, forsooth, you insisted upon having it, and making me stitch it up for you, you go about with a shabby old purse, fit for no gentleman's wear."

"I do not use it upon ordinary occasions; I have a decent, proper one—new and handsome—for every-day wear. But I put what gold I want for especial purposes into this one," laughed Fermor. "I have faith in your lucky star, Kate. I look upon you as a spoiled child of Fate, a favourite of Fortune; and therefore, any sums I want to bring a blessing, or good-luck, I always keep in the 'grum brown.'—I call it my lucky purse."

"Lucky!" she echoed. "Can the Iron Cousin give way to superstitious fancies?"

"Every one has a secret corner of superstition," smiled Fermor. "The wisest, the strongest-minded, the most sensible among us all, would we but confess it, are conscious of some point on which we are superstitious. Not a human being but has his or her pet superstition, depend upon it, Kate."

"Unless they have neither imagination nor candour," she returned; "yet without the latter, the superstition may exist, lurking cherished, for all it be unowned. I believe you are right. But here comes Mistress Verjuice Lemon-face; I leave you to settle accounts with her, and take my own leave to make my escape into the fresh air. I'll wait in the porch, until you join me. This stifling place, and that countenance close to me both at once, would be too much for my powers of endurance."

As Kate stood outside, patting White Bess, and feeding it with handfuls of grass, until Fermor Worthington should come, Ben Dimble—who had been promoted since his boyhood, from the post of attendance upon Shetland Bobby, and its girl-mistress, to that of his young lady's groom—advanced a pace or two, and touching his hat, with a shy, bashful glance, which was lost upon Kate, said:—"Oh, if you please, Miss Kate, you didn't see nobody, did you? That is, nobody in partic'lar?"

Kate Ireton's ear caught the hesitating tone, though her eye had failed to note the look.

"What do you mean, Ben?"

"I mean, Miss, you didn't see anybody, did you?"

"Oh yes; I saw a great many bodies, of various sizes," she replied; "there were a number of big girls, and little girls, and middle-sized girls, and tiny, child-girls—almost baby-girls, Ben. I suppose you know that is the new school-house, Ben?"

"Yes, Miss, I know that," said Ben; who, being an old retainer, though a young serving-man, was treated with kindly familiarity and privilege by the 'Squire and his niece.

"Well then, besides this number of small bodies, I saw a young body, and an elderly body—"

"Oh, you saw her, did ye, Miss?" said Ben.

"Yes, I saw her; and a furiously cross-grained, ill-grained, sour-looking body she is!" replied Kate.

"Oh, you mean *her*, Miss?"

"Yes; don't you, Ben?"

"No, Miss. But it don't matter; I don't mean anybody, now, thank ye, Miss Kate."

"Nobody, Ben?"

"Nobody, Miss; that is—nobody in partic'lar," said Ben.

"Perhaps you mean the 'young body' I mentioned, Ben?" said his mistress.

"Well,—perhaps I do, Miss," he stammered out.

"Oh, you do, Ben! Then I must say, she's neither cross-grained, nor ill-conditioned, nor sour-faced. She has a very nice, kind, mild face, though it looks paler than it should do,—with the close air and confinement, I suppose, poor thing!"

"It's to my notion, what an angel's must look like!" Ben Dimble blurted out.

"So, so! Somebody thinks this 'nobody' a beauty, besides some one else!" was Kate's thought within herself.

"You'd say the same, Miss Kate, if you'd seen that face as I've seen it," said Ben. "It was once rosy as an angel's, into the bargain. "That time's past," he added, with a break in his voice; "but now the rosiness is gone, the angel look is more than ever."

Mr. Worthington appearing, Ben fell back into his place; while Fermor lifted Kate to her horse, and they once more proceeded with their ride. "I made Lemon-face tell me all about her!" said Fermor.

"About 'her!' About whom?" said Kate.

"About the little sub-monitress; the pale, quiet young girl we noticed.

"We noticed! You noticed, you mean! I should not have been likely to observe such a mopish, insignificant pale-face,—which you were pleased to liken to a saint, a Raffaele head, and I know not what! It was you pointed her out to me; not I to you."

"But you could not fail to remark her! your quick, artistic eye, Kate, could not have missed the placid beauty of that head—all the more touching and interesting, for its look of sickness and sadness. And yet there is more of resignation than mournfulness in her face. She looks like one who meets sorrow with a patient, cheerful courage in the fulfilment of her duties—the best of all valour against care and trouble."

"She has known care and trouble, then?" inquired Kate.

"Much; and confronted it bravely. Her father died suddenly. She was left with an ailing mother to support. She has contrived to keep a roof over her infirm parent's head and her own, by her unaided labour; by frugal management, by unflinching industry, she was able to retain the cottage, in which they live together, adjoining the school-house. It seems that she was once as bright-checked as she is now pale—and was a sort of village belle. But an accident—a severe fall—and a long illness, just before her father's death, deprived her of her colour and good looks, leaving her also lame and slightly deformed. Her case gained her friends; and when the school-house was established, she was appointed sub-mistress. I gathered these particulars, by single drops, from Lemon-face, who unwillingly suffered them to be squeezed from her. But reluctant testimony is sometimes the most significant. The more sharply and acridly she spoke, the more I could see how genuine must be the desert which could extort this vinegar approval."

"How could the people, who showed some good sense and feeling in their appointment of the sub-mistress, show so little of either in their choice of the head-mistress!" exclaimed Kate. "Such a hateful lump of acid is not fit to come near children, far less to have the care of them!"

"I understand she has a powerful party among the directors, in her favour, who procured her the situation, and mean to maintain her there, as a proof of their own influence," said Fernor.

"And what will not men do, to carry a point wherein power and influence are concerned!" cried Kate. "Were the Iron

Cousin one of these School-house Directors, I have no doubt he would not bate an inch of his prerogative; but would keep Lemon-face in her situation, in spite of the whole board!"

"I shall see what I can do to become one of this board," replied Fermor; "and, once a director, I'll try my best to dislodge Lemon-face, and get a fitter woman appointed in her stead. It is not right that children's tempers should be soured, and their daily lives embittered, by being under the control of such a teacher."

"Bravo! If not for,—against,—the iron hand will essay its strength. Anything, as a trial of force, is welcome to the iron nature."

"And you allow no weight to the desire of prevailing in a right cause? You think I would just as lief contest for an evil principle as a good one, Kate?"

"Nay, I give full weight—due weight—iron weight—to such a desire. I have always acknowledged your dominant predilection for right and justice. A bad cause is a weak cause; and what has the Iron Cousin to do with weakness? He will always eschew wrong and evil, if it be but to avoid being worsted. But here is Mr. Chalkby's shop. Will you wait for me a moment, while I go in and choose some mill-board that I want?"

"I will come in with you," said Fermor.

There was a carriage at the door, and, when they entered, they found its lady-mistress seated at the counter, making some purchases of wools and embroidery silks. She was a Mrs. Huntley, the wife of one of 'Squire Heathcote's associates, and known slightly to Kate Ireton, as a purse-proud, arrogant woman, who thought herself the grand personage and chief lady of the neighbourhood.

Presently Fermor came to the end of the shop where Kate was being attended to by Mr. Chalkby's daughter, and whispered: "There is Mrs. Huntley waiting to catch your eye Kate."

"Is she?" replied Kate, drily, going on with what she was about.

"She is waiting to bow to you," he said.

"Let her wait," rejoined Kate. "Why need you note her expectings? Or, if you choose to note them, do so; only need to report them to me. I care nothing for them; they do not concern me."

"On the contrary, they have you for their object," he answered.

"No matter; if they are very urgent to compass their object, they will make themselves known to it, all in good time."

Presently Mrs. Huntley came up, all smiles and condescension.

"My dear Miss Ireton, how are you? Delighted to meet you, I'm sure. How is your worthy uncle? If it were hunting-season, I should know he'd be out with the hounds and Mr. Huntley, as usual, eh?"

"He is fond of a day with the dogs, madam, certainly; but I did not know you included your lord and husband among the pack, and even made him the last on your list. Ranger, Ringwood, Echo, Sweetlips, Mr. Huntley! That's hardly a fit climax—hardly fit courtesy towards one of the first gentlemen in the county."

"Oh, ay, I see! I used a mere fashion of speech, and you very properly joke me upon it, my dear Miss Ireton. Fortunately, Mr. Huntley's position will allow of a little trip in naming it with due respect. But tell me, my dear, how is your excellent uncle?"

"My uncle is in perfect hunting-health, madam, I thank you, although the season is out of his favour for giving proof of his being in that robust state.—Miss Chalkby, don't hold those heavy boards all this time; rest them here, until I can finish my selection; I will not detain you long. Can I deliver any message to my uncle for you, madam?" she added, again addressing Mrs. Huntley.

"None, I thank you, my dear Miss Ireton: oh, yes! now I think of it, you may tell him, if you please, that I mean to call upon him some morning soon, and ask him for a cutting of his Italian vipe. I hear he has one of a particularly fine sort."

"I have no doubt he will have great pleasure in giving you the slip you desire ; and I shall have much gratification in giving him one for the purpose, madam ; since he always calls the plant mine," said Kate.

"My dear Miss Ireton, you're very good, I'm sure ; I shall be delighted to have it your joint gift. Expect to see me at Heathcote as soon as possible. Good-bye ! Good morning to you, sir !" and with a bow to Fermor, whom she knew by sight, Mrs. Huntley swept out of the shop, and into her carriage, and drove off.

"I did not know you could be so disdainful, Kate," said Fermor, as they rode on again, having finished the commission.

"No ? That is not the only bad point you have still to discover in me," she replied.

"She is a woman more than double your age, Kate," he continued, gravely.

"That is not to be disputed ; it is a fact—an indubitable, legibly-written fact—a fact on the face of it," laughed she.

"She's the wife of one of your uncle's oldest and best-liked friends," he went on.

"Quite true ; Mr. Huntley is as unaffected and good-humoured as his wife is haughty and insolent."

"Haughty ! Insolent ! She was even more than polite to you, Kate. She stayed for your notice, she bore with your jesting ; both condescensions scarce seemly for you to subject a woman of her age to the rendering," said Fermor Worthington. "So far from showing haughtiness or insolence, she was only too courteous, too deferential."

"Ay, to me—that is what I resent in her ; she can be civil enough—too civil—to me, Miss Ireton, 'Squire Heathcote of Heathcote Hall's niece ; but you should see her behaviour, as I have, to her inferiors, or those she thinks her inferiors—to her waiting-maid, her footmen, her coachman. Even her husband—yet if he submit to her arrogance, e'en let him bear it for his folly. You should have seen her, as I did, the other day, to that quiet, inoffensive, blushing little creature, Lucy Chalkby. She

treated her like a mat, or a footstool; something to be put in order, and set in its place, with the toe. Talk of my disdain! You should have seen hers! And to one who had neither provoked nor deserved it."

Suddenly Kate's face changed from the scorn and indignation that coloured it high, as she caught sight of a distant object. A smile of unmixed joy beamed in her eyes, on her lips, irradiating her whole countenance, as she exclaimed; "See! there is my uncle coming to meet us! Let us gallop on towards him!"

"And what kind of a day has my Kate spent?" inquired the 'Squire, as they proceeded all three together towards the old Hall.

"An edifying ride; a quite properly-spent day altogether, uncle," cried Kate, gaily. "I have been instructed how I may turn drawing and painting into a moral lesson; have learned that they are to be regarded rather as forming a code of rules in ethical philosophy, than as mere fine arts. Then I have been taken to school, and shown how naughty it is to show any qualmishness or squeamishness at unsavoury smells, when they arise from a wholesome educational source; and made to perceive how virtuous it is to earn your own bread, and support your old mother—both of which any stork, or goose, may know, and does know, by instinct. Then, moreover, I've been read a lecture on the wickedness of disrespect to my elders, and disdain to my superiors; which latter, I beg to differ from, until I shall have quite made up my own mind on the infallible superiority of all elders, and the exact guage and estimate of so-called superiors."

"What does this rattle-pate girl mean, Fermor?" asked the 'Squire, with a fond smile, as Kate's tongue scampered on with the glib rapidity which always inspired it, when she joined her uncle after any short absence. Glad tone, and voluble utterance, seemed equally to attest the lightness of heart with which she found herself again by his side.

"It means she is glad to be released from the grim tutelage of the Iron Cousin's sage remarks and admonitions, that she may sport in the free license of the silver-haired uncle's indulgence," smiled Fermor Worthington.

"The truest thing out of the many true truths, and sober solemn verities, and unquestionable truisms, with which you have favoured me in the course of to-day, cousin mine!" exclaimed Kate. "Thank you for wasting so many of them upon my worthless self."

"No waste, if you turn them to profit," he returned. "Not worthless, since you are well worth any pains."

"Gramercy for your pains, bestowed upon my graceless self, then."

"By no means graceless, being most graceful; only a little ungracious, Kate."

"Graciousness was never my forte," she replied.

"Why not make it so?"

"I leave all strong attempts to the Iron Cousin. 'Tis his vocation, his 'forte'; he is strength itself."



CHAPTER XXVI.

AFTER a quiet period by no means unpleasant to Kate Ireton, Miss White returned to Heathcote Hall. One evening that Fermor Worthington had come over, as was his frequent wont, to spend it with his friends, the conversation turned upon a sudden stroke of good fortune that had happened to an inhabitant of Dingleton, who had obtained a large prize in the lottery.

"Now his wife will be able to make that show in the world which has so long been her ambition," said Fermor. "Hitherto it has been the show of show; now it will be show itself. However her children might lack full meals, they never wanted for smart clothes; she always kept up appearances. Now she will have it in her power to appear no richer than she really is—a priceless blessing."

"To keep up appearances, in the midst of actual distress, is most respectable, don't you think so, Mr. Worthington?" said Alicia White.

"Very respectable," he answered. "Mrs. Semble was a perfectly respectable woman."

"Yet she was a woman I could never respect," said Kate. "She was not exactly a liar, or even an equivocator. Yet she had a way of what she called putting things in an advantageous light; of making matters tell; of giving words a colouring such as she wished them to assume, when she repeated any fact. I never liked Mrs. Semble. I'm glad she has got a fortune, and is gone to spend it elsewhere."

"But do you not approve of making the most you can of bad matters, Kate?" said Alicia.

"No; the least made of them the better. Leave bad alone, or you make it worse," replied she.

"Unless you mend it altogether, honestly, and diligently, and truly, and so convert it into good," said Fermor.

"I mean, don't you think it is wise and right to make misfortunes pass off as well as you can? To make circumstances appear as creditably as possible?" pursued Alicia White.

"I think it perhaps the most worldly wise, but certainly not the most worthily wise," answered Kate. "If you wear a shabby coat, the world will probably hold you to be a poor shabby fellow, and treat you accordingly; but if you know you can't afford to dress better, and are conscious that it is neither poverty of spirit nor shabbiness of soul that occasions it, wear your shabby coat still, and try if you can't make the world know you for what you are, and treat you properly, in spite of your appearance."

"But it is a positive duty to do our utmost to put a good face on disagreeables and difficulties, however desperate," said Miss White. "And why not set things in their best and most advantageous light?"

"Why not let them appear as they are?" replied Kate. "Even if they chance to stand in their own light a little by doing so, yet that's better than making them stand out too falsely prominent. Better they should keep in the shade, than be shown up by artificial glare."

"You have not kept in the shade since you have been away from us, Alicia, my dear," said the 'Squire; "a little bird whispered me that you have been shining very brilliantly at some musical parties lately; and that at one, where my little bird was present, you enchanted the whole room, and were unanimously declared the best pianoforte-player ever heard. He said that, for his part, he liked your finger better than e'er a Clementi or a Kalkbrenner of them all."

"'He!' who? who, my dear 'Squire, could have told you this?" said Alicia White.

"Ah, you Eve's own daughter!" laughed the 'Squire. "So you are curious to know where the little bird roosts. But I shall leave you to guess. It will be a pretty riddle for you. I shall only tell you that the poor fellow was well nigh distraught to hear you again. He raved like a madman about your playing, for he's passionately fond of music."

"And are you, 'Squire?" asked Miss White.

"I am very fond of *some* music," he said; "but it must be my own particular sort of music. However, I never hear any; so I make myself content without it."

"I wish I could try if my music is the sort of music you like, 'Squire," said Miss White; "what a pity that you have no instrument here. It is the only thing Heathcote Hall lacks to render it perfect."

"The roc's egg!" smiled Fermor.

"There is an old instrument somewhere; a harpsichord, a spinnet, I hardly know what; but my Kate got me to have it put in order for her when we first came home, and perhaps that might do to let us hear you upon. Kate, my darling, where is it? You routed it out of some remote corner, and stowed it away in one of your own. Where is it now?"

"It is an old-fashioned thing, Alicia; it has not sufficient compass for you to play upon. You are doubtless accustomed to the good modern instruments,—to a pianoforte; this is only a harpsichord," said Kate.

"No matter; I will make it do, to try and please the 'Squire

with," said Alicia. "Let me see it, Kate, dear. In which room is it? Let us go there."

"Lead the way, Kate; I am anxious to hear Alicia. It is long since I have had anything like a treat of music," said the 'Squire.

Kate rose at her uncle's words, lighted a taper, and ushered them upstairs into the little room occupying the odd walled-in angle of the building.

"Another den, Kate?" whispered Fermor Worthington, as Miss White sat down to the instrument, and played a brilliant prelude. The nod with which Kate Ireton replied, served to clear off the shade of vexation with which she had perceived herself compelled to bring them hither; and the pleasure with which she was soon listening to Alicia White's really fine execution, left her speaking face with no other expression than that of pure delight upon it.

At the first pause in the music, there was a sincere burst of admiration from the assembled party.

"My dear Alicia! how much we have lost by not hearing you before!" said the 'Squire. "But you must indulge me often in this way, now that I know you have this rare talent. By mercy! that's something like playing! I hate your mere one, two, three, four in-a-bar style of young lady strumming; mere banging, to measure. But such meaning, such beauty, such expression as that, is worth hearing indeed! Is it asking you too much, my dear, to play me another piece?"

"As many as you please; as long as you like; I am never tired, dear sir. Only tell me you wish me to play, and it will be a delight to me to do so, whenever you feel inclined."

"You are very good, my dear. Then I am ready now."

Alicia White next played a movement full of fire and animation; then followed a charming *andante*, in which she seemed to make the tones glide into one another, so even was her touch, so admirably smooth a *legato* could she deliver, by the perfectly equalized power of her fingers. Her listeners again repaid her with unfeigned applause. "You are a delightful audience," she

said ; " so still, so attentive, so aware of the merits of the composition, so lenient to the defects of the performer."

" So enjoying her faultless excellence, you mean," said Kate. " You are too good a musician, Alicia, not to be aware that you play admirably. Your style is quite masterly."

" You are very, very kind, Kate," said Alicia.

" I never praise from kindness. Whenever I praise, it is because I feel it—because I can't help it," replied Kate. " It would amount to a downright falsehood, to hold one's tongue about such playing as that."

" From this instrument being in one of your dens, Kate, I conclude you play yourself," said Fermor, as Miss White turned once more to the harpsichord and ran her fingers over the keys, as if trying to remember something else.

" Hush ! Alicia is going to give us another piece," she replied.

" She is but preluding. Tell me, is it not so ? You play yourself, Kate ? "

" Be quiet : I want to listen, not talk."

" You don't want to listen to that ; it is merely preparative."

" It is better worth hearing than a tormenting iron clangour, a peal of iron pertinacity : be still, I beg, and leave me in peace."

Fermor Worthington moved away. But he went to the 'Squire's side ; and when Alicia had finished a very beautiful sonata, he said : " Kate plays, of course, 'Squire ? "

" Does she ? " was the reply. " But as you say, of course she must ; or how comes the instrument here, in her own little dressing-room ? Kate, my dear, come hither."

" Yes, uncle."

" I want to hear how my Kate can play herself. But tolerably, I dare say. We can't expect you to be a first-rate performer like Alicia. But still I should like to hear you."

" Should you, uncle ? "

" Yes, my Kate."

" Then I'll do my best—for *you*, uncle."

She went to the instrument with a burning cheek, but a firm,

resolved air. She had nerved herself by that one thought, against the acute pain it cost her to sit down and play for the first time in her life before any other than her teacher. No human ear, save Mrs. Lindon's and her own, had ever till now hearkened to her; and it caused her a pang of trepidation known only to those who indulge a solitary study of music for their own delight purely, to feel that she had listeners.

She played a short plaintive air, one that lived in her memory for its ineffable sweetness and tenderness, its voluptuous melancholy, its profound and passionate, yet simple pathos.

When it was ended, not a soul uttered a word for some moments.

Alicia White was the first who spoke. "To use your own phrase, Kate dear, it would be absolute fibbing, to withhold praise from such music as that!" she said.

"And yet silence is its only fit meed," said Fermor, in a low voice.

"It is lovely! Absolute perfection! Where did you hear it? Where did you learn it? Where is it to be got?" continued Alicia.

"I heard it in an opera, abroad; it took my fancy, and I tried to remember it. It is a tenor air, I believe," answered Kate. "All I know of music consists in a few airs I have picked up by chance—by ear; I never could learn a set piece. Poor Mrs. Lindon gave up hoping to make anything of me as a performer."

"Play me another of your picked-up airs, Kate; I like them," said the 'Squire, whose honest eyes were full.

She played again; and again the most genuine of comments—an unspoken one, followed.

"Kate, dear, you have perfect expression, perfect feeling, in your playing," said Miss White.

"I feel what I play, certainly; I could not play it at all, else. Unless an air strikes me with some peculiar sense of beauty, I cannot master it; and I never attempt it."

"Both the airs you have played, Kate, are *songs*," said Fermor Worthington.

"Well, and what then?"

"Then it is probable that you sing, as well as play."

She made no answer; but turned away, and put her fingers upon a chord, mutely, merely pressing the keys, without sounding them.

"Can you sing, Kate?" said the 'Squire.

"I wish you would not ask me, uncle."

"Why, child?"

"Because I must answer *you*; and if I answer must speak the truth."

"I think we are answered, 'Squire," smiled Fermor.

"I think we are," returned he. "If she could not sing, she would have said so at once."

"There was no question of 'we' being answered; I said I must answer *you*, uncle; and you have not insisted upon a reply. You do not press me upon points that you feel are disagreeable to me."

"I hate to 'insist' upon anything with you, you rogue, and you know it," said the 'Squire.

"You have no natural disposition to tease, and torment, and persist, and carry a point, uncle mine," she said. "You can be contented without perpetually testing your power."

"Because the 'Squire knows full well his power, its existence, its extent," said Fermor Worthington.

"If he were doubtful of it, he might be more anxious to ascertain its force, you mean?" she said, with a brighter light in her eyes; but which, being cast down, revealed no glance of the look playing there; "there is something in that; uncle ought to know and feel his limitless power by this time, so that a hint of his will suffices perfectly."

"And you know what his wish is now, though it has not been expressed as his will," replied Fermor.

"Indirectly, if not directly; through another, if not by himself, the Iron Cousin contrives to compass *his* 'will,'" she returned. "That is evident enough."

"Kate, dear, I really do wish you would let us hear you sing," said Miss White.

"Alicia has earned a right to ask for whatever she likes, in return for her having so readily obliged us," said the 'Squire. "Sing, my Kate, as well as you can; it will be sure to please your old uncle."

Kate instantly turned to the instrument; and, accompanying herself with a few simple chords, poured forth the rich volume of a full, pure, weighty voice. It had no great compass; very little flexibility; scarcely any power of execution; but it was instinct with natural sentiment; it was full of genuine, unrestrained, untutored impulse; it gave unchecked expression to the emotions of heart and soul.

The air was one which needed little force of skill; but it demanded true feeling, and that the singer gave in perfection.

There was a pause at the close. Then the 'Squire rose, and going up to where Kate sat, took her head in both his hands, and held it against his breast silently for some moments. Then he stooped over her, pressed his lips upon her hair, and softly shutting down the instrument, drew her arm within his, and led the way down stairs.

Very often, after that, the 'Squire made her sing and play. He would get both Kate and Alicia to go with him to the little dressing-room, and have an hour or two's thorough revel in music; this quiet, but plenary enjoyment of his own favourite pieces, his own chosen airs, his free indulgence in whatever repetitions, or caprices, or freaks of selection he gave way to at the moment, being just what he liked.

Frequently, when Fermor Worthington came of an evening, he found that they had spent whole mornings in the little music-den; or had just come down from a long afternoon spell of singing and playing there.

"Alicia played me to-day one of the most beautiful pieces I ever heard—even from her," said the 'Squire, enthusiastically. "When I asked what it was, she gave me one of your musician answers, that's as good—or rather as bad—as Greek to me; some

German man's name, in some key or other. 'Somebody, in something sharp, minor or major,' she called it; but seeing me look as wise as ever, she added that it was sometimes called 'the moonlight concerto.' Didn't you, my dear?"

"Very nearly right, dear 'Squire," replied Alicia White; " 'the moonlight sonata,' you mean."

"Concerto, or sonata—they all seem to me pretty nearly the same kind of names; but the things themselves I know quite well, one from another. Don't I, Kate? Oh, she's not here; she's gone to see White Bess, who hurt her foot yesterday. But don't I, Alicia?"

"That you do, my dear 'Squire. You are becoming quite a cognoscente—a fanatico; with discrimination in your knowledge, and judgment in your fanaticism."

"I wish I had an opportunity of forming my taste and judgment in so good a school," said Fermor Worthington. "If there were an instrument here in the sitting-room, I might have a chance of profiting by Miss White's playing, to cultivate them. And such skill should have a better medium for doing itself justice, than the poor old harpsichord. 'Squire, I am going to ask your permission to present my cousin Kate with a pianoforte on her coming birthday, that we may have an opportunity of hearing her friend's brilliant finger in its proper perfection."

"A pianoforte, my dear fellow? I fear we should never get Kate to accept so costly a gift as that. She might object—she might feel that it was too much for a birthday present, which should be some trifle, some pretty tasteful toy, that does well enough to show regard, but is of no great price. Kate has very odd particular notions in some things; she won't let me give her anything too costly; she forbids me to buy whatever shall exceed a certain sum; and I'm afraid she'll expect you to observe the same conditions, or she'll perhaps refuse to receive it altogether; and that'd be a pity—a disappointment."

"When she sees a horizontal grand pianoforte, with extra compass and additional keys—one fit for instrumental performance—one adapted to exhibit the merits of her friend's playing,

she will consent to accept it, for the sake of hearing what we all so much admire," urged Fermor.

"My dear boy, I speak principally on your account; I should not like to see you mortified; and I fear lest Kate should not like—should say—in short, Kate is apt to express herself pretty freely when she is displeased; and she might, you know, if your birthday offering were more than she thought it should be."

"If you do not forbid me, I'll run the risk of a sharp word or two. You know, cousin Kate and I are used to sparring; I would not mind some hazard, to ensure the object in view."

Miss White, who had looked much fluttered and pleased all along, very nearly bowed in reply to these concluding words of Fermor Worthington. But she restrained herself just in time from this palpable token of taking his compliment to herself; and said instead: "By the way, 'Squire, you never told me who was the little bird that carried you the news of my playing. A little tell-tale-tit! I should like to—I don't know what I couldn't find in my heart to do to it."

"Not wring its neck, I hope? It deserves caresses for its pleasant tidings, I think," said Fermor. "It was the means of introducing a great pleasure to us all."

"Oh no—oh dear, no! Not wring its neck! I wouldn't be so cruel, upon any account," said Miss White, simpering and reddening.

"Then of course you'll prepare to grant the caresses, and give one of your prettiest and sweetest kisses to my friend, Will Huntley, the next time he comes here," said the 'Squire. "He was the little bird; and being a safe old married man into the bargain, you may venture to bestow on him the dainty reward, my dear, and tell him how much obliged to him we all are."

Alicia White reddened still more; but looked as if it arose from rather a different feeling now. However, she rallied; and said with her smile of amiability: "You may command me in anything, my dear 'Squire. Even my salutes are at your disposal; secure that you will never desire me to bestow them otherwise than properly."

"The 'Squire will very likely require you to confer some of them upon himself, if you empower him thus far," said Fermor Worthington.

"He's too discreet, and too honest, to appropriate what is entrusted to him," said Kate, who had entered during the latter part of the conversation; "besides, there is an old rule, which excludes certain people from participation in personal questions 'Present company,' you know, 'are always excepted.'"

"Thank you, Kate dear, for coming to my assistance," said Miss White.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MIDSUMMER, with its wealth of bloom and foliage, had scarcely arrived, when with it appeared the joyous countenance, frank laugh, and pleasant-spirited readiness to be pleased, of Cecil Lascelles. He had slipped away from the tedious grandeurs, and stilted hospitalities, and lofty amenities, of Castle Wrexham, to the ease and happiness of Heathcote Hall, ripe for a gay, free, boyish holiday with the friends he had learned to like so well. He felt far more at home, far more fully and entirely on terms of familiarity and intimacy with them, than he did with his own uncle—George Damer, Earl of Wrexham, and Baron of Ludleigh. The cold, distant, formal lord, superbly patronizing his nephew, and seigneurially encouraging his sister, was not the personage to win Cecil Lascelles' regard. Feeling that he could not show more than a cool, stiff deference in return for the cool, stiff kindness that was accorded him, he was not slow in trying to obtain his mother's consent that he should return for a time to Heathcote, until she could learn for him his uncle's final decision respecting the future career he would advise him to pursue. This consent was at length yielded, on the understanding that he was to hold himself ready at any time to attend her summons; she feeling, perhaps, that while her plans were in operation, the

object of them was quite as well absent as present, since he neither understood their scope nor could aid in their furtherance. He only generally knew that his mother was anxious to obtain her brother's counsel in the choice of a profession for him, and desirous of interesting him on his behalf; and that until this oracular kinsman had pronounced his sanctional fiat, nothing could be settled or undertaken.

Cecil Lascelles was of a buoyant, light-hearted temperament, little given to care or forethought. He enjoyed the present, lived in the present, and left the future to provide for itself. He had hitherto found the future prove a very pleasant time when it arrived, leaving him nothing to do but to turn it into an agreeable present. He had no regrets in the past, no solitudes for the future; and the present was quite to his taste, especially now, when it consisted in the exchange of the frigid atmosphere of Castle Wrexham for the warm, congenial temperature of Heathcote Hall.

The welcome with which he was met there, showed that his advent was no less welcome to those who received him, than his coming among them again was a delight to himself.

"And now for our postponed excursion! A good scamper across the Oakleigh Downs, over to Oakleigh Hill!" exclaimed the 'Squire.

"And the ride to Beanfield Grange, uncle, and the one to Thorncroft Hollow, and to the Copse Mill, and to Ashe Common. We'll show you, Cecil, that our county can boast more varied and beautiful rides than any in the three United Kingdoms," said Kate.

"And then I shall put in my claim to your promise that you will come and see the old grey gables of Worthington, and its antique terrace, and the venerable greenness of its time-honoured trees," said Fermor.

"That should be reserved to the last, as being the most beautiful spot of them all," said Miss White.

"You see, the Iron Cousin proposed it so, knowing that the pre-eminence of climax belonged of right to Worthington Court

None are more keenly alive to the proud, surpassing beauty of the place than its proud owners themselves. They have openly gloried in it, from time immemorial. Their pride of demesne has been the rooted growth of successive generations."

"That bespeaks it to be a very old family, and it consequently cherishes a very natural pride," said Cecil. "Few prides are more pardonable—I had almost said laudable—than the pride which springs from being a member of an old county family, honoured and distinguished for centuries."

"Then, of course, you, Cecil, own to some self-glorification in the fact of being a descendant from a family which can number earls, barons, honourables, and right honourables among its scions?" said Kate.

"I believe those said barons and earls," answered Cecil, "had yet to be created, when the Worthingtons were already ages existing. Our patrician honourables and right honourables still ranked among plebeians when the owners of Worthington Court had been gentry from grandsire and great-grandsire. Counted by reverence of antiquity, ours is the aristocracy of a mushroom, compared with that of an oak."

"And that sprang from an acorn!" laughed Kate. "The origin, after all, is no great affair."

"Yet less ignoble than mushroom-spawn, you'll allow, Kate?" said Cecil.

"True," she answered. "You have made out your case in favour of the hog-food over the human dainty. Swine batten and fatten upon forest mast, while the lords of the creation make epicurean morsels of broiled mushrooms. Still, I presume, you are victor in the argument. Be it so. I leave you master of the field."

The morning appointed for the visit to Worthington Court proved fair in the extreme. The summer had attained its full glow of seasonal warmth and beauty. The sky was without a cloud; of a clear, perfect blue. The woods lay bathed in the golden rays of the sun—their massive and lofty amplitude of boughs exuberant in full-leaved greenness, their dark embrowned

boles showing richly in harmonious contrast; the emerald turf which carpeted the inward-leading glades, softening and melting into dim distance beneath the shadow of the over-arching trees; the verdant slopes of the more open uplands, blending into neutral tints, and deep-lilac suffusion, as they swelled afar into meadow, copse, corn-field, or hill-side.

‘Tis a land, indeed, to be proud of!’ exclaimed Cecil Lascelles, as the party stood on the old stone terrace of Worthington Court, which commanded a broad extent of prospect. “Who can wonder that we English entertain a strong love of country? It is no slight privilege to call any portion of this glorious spot of earth our own! It might well make a man envious—were a fellow worthy the name of man who could stoop to envy—towards the possessor of such an estate as Heathcote or Worthington. You country gentlemen have a right to the emotion of pride, if any one in the whole world has! To call such acres his own, might well stir an anchorite to a sense of self-importance.”

“It is, indeed, a perfect Paradise of a place,” murmured Miss White.

“There is one thing that always mars its perfection, to my idea,” said Kate Ireton. “Why, on earth, good cousin, do you allow yonder hideous block of building to remain stuck there, in the midst of that fine sweep of lawn?”

“I have often thought to ask you the same thing, Fermor, my boy;” said her uncle. “It really hurts the eye. If I were you, I would have it pulled down at once.”

“On no account,” Fermor said, briefly.

“What can you want with it there? It’s of no use, is it?” said the Squire.

“It is an ice-house; it is still used,” replied Fermor.

“But you could have an ice-house built somewhere else, where it would not be seen. Just there, it is, as Kate says, hideous. Take my advice, and down with it at once.”

“By no means; ugly as it may be, it must remain there,” said Fermor.

"One of the Iron Cousin's 'musts!'" laughed Kate

"Just so," he said, with his grave smile.

"For my part, I think it's a very picturesque old building. It reminds me of the romantic Maus-thurm, on the Rhine," said Alicia White.

"'Picturesque!'" You are joking, Alicia! And as for the Maus-thurm, that's where it should be—pitched in the middle of a stream. But this heap of rubbish is set just in a spot where it affronts every body's taste and good sense," said Kate.

"It is an unsightly thing enough, it must be owned," assented Fermor. "Nevertheless, I shall let it remain where it is. The worst defect it has, in my eyes, is, that it impedes my best view of the Heathcote grounds. Still, it cannot be removed."

"Pshaw! why not? A couple of men would raze it to the ground in one morning, and the next it might be all cleared away—not a trace left. Be persuaded, Fermor, order it to be done," said the 'Squire, as he took Cecil and Alicia away with him to see the fine sycamore-tree at the other end of the terrace.

"You will have it pulled down, will you not?" said Kate Ireton.

"Not upon any consideration," he replied hastily, but firmly.

"Not to please—not if your wilful cousin, Kate, makes it her particular request?"

He looked disturbed—pained; but he did not answer.

Kate Ireton repeated her words yet more earnestly.

In his deep, full voice—which always lowered, under emotion—Fermor said: "There is not a living being—not a human power—that could make me destroy that old building. In saying this to *you*, Kate, I show that nothing can move me in this."

There was somewhat of even solemn appeal in his manner, yet Kate could not refrain from persisting. "You show, what you have always shown that there is nothing capable of moving you from one of your iron purposes. I am not accustomed to

ask in vain ; and I ask you to knock down an ugly ruin, a blot, an eye-sore ; why not do a reasonable thing, and grant me a favour for once ? ”

“ I have told you, that if for any one breathing, I would do this for you, Kate. But there is more than mere idle will and pleasure, or carrying a foolish point, at stake. A pledge, not of earth, depends upon my keeping faith in this. Listen, Kate, and I will tell you why I cannot have yonder building destroyed.”

“ No matter,” she said, lightly ; “ I have no curiosity. That is not one of my errors. I have not the least wish to hear this mighty secret. Pray keep it—as you keep your resolutions, inviolate. I thank you, however, for one wisdom you have taught me. Never more shall Kate Ireton beseech aught at the Iron Cousin’s hands. As the lady in the play says : ‘ You teach me how a beggar should be answered.’ ”

She turned away, with a half-playful curtsy, to join her uncle and the others, leaving Fermor looking deeply hurt. But he mastered his discomposure, and went forward to fulfil his duty as host and entertainer.

There was a luxurious collation of cold viands and fruits, spread beneath one of the broad, shady beech-trees on the lawn, near the base of the terrace-steps, leading from one side of the old mansion, and of this Fermor Worthington now invited his guests to partake. The bland, midsummer atmosphere, the eating in the open air, the beauty of the spot, the freedom and unrestraint of the smiling talk, conspired to make it a feast—a rural banquet to those assembled. They more than once declared they had never enjoyed a day more completely to their taste.

“ Confess that this more than rivals Italy, Kate ! ” exclaimed Cecil. “ Do you remember our melancholy large party at Pratolino ? The huge conventionality, the ungenial profusion, the tiresome merriment ? Defend me from an overgrown picnic, ye gods of festive comfort ! ”

“ The place itself was beautiful,—most beautiful,” said Kate

"It was ; but the chief beauty of Pratolino is, in my eyes its extraordinary likeness to an English pleasure-ground," said Cecil. "It has just that green wildness, combined with trim order and cultivation, so perfectly characteristic of England, so seldom seen in parched-up Italy."

"Blaspheme not !" laughed Kate. "You know I cannot bear a word against Italian perfection."

"Save when we have what is still better—English perfection," said Cecil.

"Pity it is so rare ! Once in a hundred years, perhaps, we have such a perfect day as this, such a perfect open-air meal, such perfect association, in such a perfect scene. I allow, when you do attain English perfection, there is not its equal. But when, alas ! do you meet with it ? Once in a century."

"The more precious and choice, being so rare ! Let us make the most of its aloe-like bloom and beatitude," said Cecil, true to his propensity for enjoying the present in all its brightness, undulled and undisturbed by one shadowing thought of past or future.

The conversation flowed on gaily, good-humouredly, in sprightly, careless ease, each one feeling the force of Cecil's pleasant philosophy.

At length they rose from table, the 'Squire proposing that Fermor should show Cecil Lascelles the interior of the fine old house ; its spacious drawing-room, its noble library, suites of wainscoted apartments, its lofty hall, its corridors, galleries, and staircase of polished oak.

"And you must not forget to show Mr. Lascelles that interesting picture which hangs in the 'lady's morning-room,' as it used to be called. I have a perfect recollection of that sweet painting, and of the room itself," said Miss White. "I quite dote upon that room ; it is so charmingly old-fashioned, so quaintly furnished, so altogether nice !"

"An odd corollary ! a singularly forceful, expressive climax !" said Kate Ireton. "What a strange word you have found to sum up your admiration of that room, Alicia."

"Don't you think it nice, Kate?" asked she.

"Not at all; I think those were nice strawberries and cream nice nectarines, nice iced plum-pudding, nice jellies, we had just now; but that room I should as soon think of calling nice, as of saying that Westminster Abbey was a nice cathedral; or the Alps were nice mountains; or that Bacon was a nice sweet writer."

"Most salt and savory, rather!" laughed Cecil. "But let us go and see this favourite room of Miss White's, and we'll try and find out the true epithet for it, amongst us."

"And you must see the picture,—quite a lovely portrait,—and so like the brother," whispered Alicia White, in her articulate aside.

Kate Ireton, while the rest gathered round the painting, sat quietly down, a little apart, with her eyes fixed absently upon the object opposite to her, which chanced to be the old inlaid cabinet, that had so often attracted her childish speculation as to the wonders it probably contained.

"What is it engages your attention, Kate, dear, and prevents your coming to see that exquisite picture?" said Miss White, advancing towards her. "Oh, I see! that handsome cabinet. It is magnificently wrought; and I've no doubt contains some valuable curiosities. I dare say you will grant us a peep into its treasures, Mr. Worthington, amongst the rest of the beautiful things you have been showing us to-day in your castle of enchantment."

"Willingly," replied Fermor, taking a small bunch of keys from his pocket, and applying one of them to the lock. It has been in the family since no one can tell when; and has been a repository of all sorts of odds and ends in its time. There are a few coins and medals worth looking at, in one of the drawers; and in two or three of the others, some good shells."

On opening the outer doors of the cabinet, they revealed within, a double range of side drawers; between which there was a recess fitted up in pigeon-holes for papers; and along the base, there ran a shallow drawer, which occupied the whole length of the enclosure.

With exemplary patience Fermor Worthington gratified Miss White's eagerness to peep into one after the other of these various receptacles, pulling out drawer after drawer for her, answering her numerous inquiries, and satisfying her minute inquiries relative to their contents. But there was one which she perceived he invariably passed over, evading all hints, and parrying all attempts to have it opened for her inspection. This was the long shallow drawer beneath the rest. At first she thought his not following her lead was accidental; that he either did not notice, or did not understand her hints; but when she became aware that his declining to open this drawer was intentional, her curiosity became excited, and rose to an almost unbearable pitch, from the stimulus of finding itself perpetually frustrated.

At length she made a dash at procuring her own relief; but just as she was going to draw it forth herself, in an easy, take-for-granted way, Fermor Worthington laid his hand on hers, saying: "Pardon me; there is nothing there that will interest you—nothing to see."

"Fermor, Cecil and I are going to the stable, to have a peep at your stud," said the 'Squire.

"I'll go with you," replied Fermor. "Miss White, I fancy, has seen all that there is to be seen in this nest of curiosities, and can dispense with their showman."

"Thank you; oh, yes! Yet stay, I want to look at that fine specimen of Nautilus again. But don't let me detain you. I can examine it quite well by myself."

He drew forth the drawer of shells containing the one she mentioned, and went away with the 'Squire and Cecil.

Kate Ireton had gone to the old nook in the window-seat, and was lounging peaceably there, looking up at the picture, when she heard Alicia say, "Nothing to see, indeed! it's all but empty!"

"Why, you surely have not opened that drawer, Alicia, which you found he did not show you himself!"

"Why not? He didn't forbid me to open it. And after all, there's no reason why he should. There is literally nothing to

see in it. Nothing whatever, excepting an old riding-whip," said Alicia White, as she closed the drawer again. "He could not have cared whether I opened it or no; but he had begun by not opening it, and therefore persisted, merely for persisting sake. I begin to think you are quite right, Kate, in calling him 'the Iron Cousin.' He's monstrous impenetrable; but somehow he's only the more charming and manly for it. Many men have that way with them. They think it dignified. But with a little patience, a woman knows how to win her way through all that, to humour him, and get him to be not so dignified and impenetrable *towards her*; and that's all she need care about. And I'm sure he's so very handsome, and so gentlemanly, and so altogether—altogether—nice (you'll laugh at me, Kate, dear, but I don't mind that, from you), that he's worth any woman's trying to please."

Miss White might have run on to any length; for, since the words 'an old riding-whip,' Kate had not heard one syllable of what she was saying. Her thoughts were involuntarily busying themselves with the question whether this could be the whip she had believed thrown away; but which was thus locked apart, and kept from indifferent eyes.

"Don't you think so, Kate? Why, what a brown study you're in."

Kate started. "Don't I think what?" she said, rousing herself from her fit of abstraction.

"Don't you think Mr. Worthington is worth a woman's trying to please?"

"It depends upon the woman," answered Kate.

"But any woman, I mean. He's so very handsome, and distinguished-looking,—he might be a nobleman, from his air,—that any woman might feel proud to endeavour to find out his tastes, and to accommodate herself to them, and to please him, in short, in every way she could."

"Some women would be too proud to do anything of the kind," said Kate.

"You think it mean to try to please, Kate. Now, I think it

only a woman's duty ; it is so right, so proper, so becoming, in us women to render ourselves as agreeable as we possibly can, to those who are our natural protectors."

"It may be very wise, very prudent, and even extremely becoming, Alicia ; you have a talent for looking, speaking, and acting becomingly—I have not. I can only be natural ; and I believe my nature is rather the reverse of right or proper, wise or prudent."

"You don't do yourself justice, you don't indeed, Kate, dear," said Alicia White. "But here are the gentlemen returning. Let us go and meet them."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"AND how did my darling sleep, through all the roar of thunder last night ?" said Matty, coming into her young lady's room, according to custom, the first thing in the morning ; for Kate Ireton, knowing how it would pain the faithful creature's heart to see herself displaced by a younger attendant, had never taken a waiting-maid, but remained contented with Matty's dressing. "Did the lightning waken you ? It was very strong. Ben tells me it has struck more than one tree in the park ; and he did hear that it has knocked down a good few at Worthington Court, besides the old ice-house ; and that it hit one of the lodge-gates. It's lucky you and master, and the rest, was returned home afore the storm come on."

"The lightning has done mischief at Worthington ?" exclaimed Kate, rapidly.

"Not up at the house, deary ; only about the place ; and no great mischief there. That old ramshackle ice-house was of no consequence ; it was as well down as up, or better, every body always said it was quite in the way, stuck where it was ; and as

for the lodge, it was only the gate,—not the lodge itself,—where the keeper and his wife and child live.”

“And now, Mattykin, dress me in no time, for I want to know how uncle rested.”

“And how am I to dress you as you ought to be dressed, pray, this day of all days in the year, if I’m to do it in no time?” said Matty.

“Why, what day is this, that it should have me grace it with extra care in my hair-brushing, and collar-pinning? Oh, ay, true, my birthday! You would remember it, Mattykin, wouldn’t you, if all the rest of the world, like myself, forgot it?”

“To be sure I should, darling. Quite a different day it was—the birthday itself, I mean—the day you were born. Black, and bleak, and sullen, and cold, for all it was summer-time. But then it was up in the North, you know.”

“Now, Matty, give me my cuffs, and now, one last pin, and then one kiss—or half-a dozen, if you will—and then let me run down to breakfast, there’s a dear Mattykin; and I promise you to find some half-hour in the day to come up and listen to all the particulars you please to tell me, about my baby self on my first of birthdays.”

She found all the party assembled in the breakfast-room, including Fermor Worthington, who had ridden over to inquire how his guests of the preceding day had reached home, and whether they were housed before the storm began.

“This is your glorious English weather! your ‘English perfection,’ Cecil!” said she. “Well might you say, enjoy it while we may. A few hours have sufficed to change the warmth and sunshine into damp and discomfort; dripping trees, muddy roads, and lowering sky.”

“I found the morning by no means unpleasant,” said Fermor; “the rain had cooled the air; the thunder and lightning had cleared off all sultry oppression. The drops sparkling on the boughs were pleasant to the eye, and the leaves looked saturated with the welcome refreshment. My horse and I quite enjoyed our early ride.”

"Fawn-foot has probably imbibed some of his master's strange taste for disagreeables," laughed Kate, "or he would not like plodding through sludge and mire to pay a duty visit at seven o'clock in the morning."

"The early hour shows it to be no mere ceremonial call; moreover, it has a double pleasure instead of a simple duty for its object. The one I have already had, in learning that you all got home well; and the other I now take, in wishing many happy returns of her birthday to Kate, and to those who love her."

"Is this your birthday, Kate, dear? Let me wish you joy!" said Alicia White.

"Of what? Of being a year nearer to being old and ugly?" laughed she. "But I thank you for your kind wish, Alicia, though I dare say it involves my reaching that dire condition."

"Which is remote enough from your present one, to let you contemplate it with a very comfortable degree of indifference for a long while to come," said Cecil, in the same tone. "The age of eighteen can afford to look steadily at the prospect of wrinkles and white hairs. Distance wonderfully softens its terrors."

"That was a very fair craft-bait, Cecil, to fish out my age. I give you credit for your artifice, but it shall not succeed."

"Kate giving credit to anything that has a hint of artifice in it!" said Fermor. "She is plainness and straightforwardness itself."

"I merely admit its ingenuity; while I show my disapproval, by not suffering it to gain its end," she said.

"And what if I ask the question in blunt, downright form?" smiled Cecil.

"You would be likely to get a blunt, downright negative in return," she answered. "And there would you be, as far as ever from attaining your object, after having committed the rudeness of putting a question, which in no form is reckoned discreet."

"Discretion may venture an enquiry, where Sincerity risks

nothing in satisfying it," replied Cecil, gaily. "Ten years hence, Discretion might hesitate, feeling that he put Sincerity to the test, and tempted it to belie its nature, by playing false to its sister Truth, and having recourse to some distant kinsfolk, and poor relations, called White Lies; but now that Sincerity can answer honestly with perfect safety, Discretion asks questions, fearless of being bid to add the prefix of I N to his name, for his pains."

"But Discretion can count on his fingers, or reckon in his wise head; and when the ten years are over, he will have added up a sum to Sincerity's discredit. No; there is nothing for Discretion, if he wish to preserve his character, but to hold his peace, lay his finger on his lips, bid his tongue keep still, and his curiosity be quiet."

"Discretion is silenced, if not convinced," said Cecil.

The post-bag being here brought in, and found to contain letters for the 'Squire, Cecil, and Alicia, they were left in peace to peruse them; Kate sauntering over to the window-seat, whither Fermor soon after followed her.

"No riding, such a dank, dismal morning as this!" she said, looking ruefully out upon the steaming earth and moist grass; with the sun veiled and misty, threatening every moment to withdraw his countenance, and yield the day to the dominion of rain and shower.

"Then we must try and spend a cheerful, pleasant one indoors; no great difficulty, with such materials at hand. Three or four people assembled together, who like each other, who have tastes and opinions in common, yet who are sufficiently dissimilar in character to differ amicably, and contend playfully, can always contrive to pass their time in happy independence of time, place, or weather," said Fermor.

"Yet weather is a serious drawback to perfect enjoyment," replied Kate. "Even when comfortably and snugly housed, the looking out upon a bright, sunshiny day, is a very different affair from looking forth upon dreary, pouring wet. The one is an intensely delightful enhancement of holiday feeling; the other is a cruel damp to it."

"That is because you have a lively imagination, a sensitive temperament, and are of an impressionable nature," replied Fermor Worthington.

"There's one of the advantages of being of an iron constitution," she rejoined. "Such natures are impervious to effects of weather, exempt from climatal and atmospheric influences, insensible to seasonal changes, unsubject to ascendancy of earth, sea, or sky. Yet sometimes the elements compel even these stubborn impenetrables to yield, and submit to their decrees, and confess that the powers of the air transcend their small mighty power—of will. I hear that last night's lightning struck the old ice-house, and levelled it with the ground. No human power was to avail, in overthrowing it; but even iron wills must be content to give way, when Tempests exert theirs, and enforce it with a thunder-bolt."

"It was struck, but not thrown down; scathed, but not destroyed," said Fermor, quietly. "What damage was done, is this morning being repaired; workmen are now employed restoring the roof, which was the only portion injured."

"Why, this is very midsummer madness! A fit of strange iron delirium. A kind of disease for which we shall have to invent a cure—a feropathy; or we must discover and prescribe some medicinal waters the very reverse of chalybeate. Truly, cousin mine, I fear for your sanity."

"Can you not understand that there is some grave reason beneath this apparent caprice of obstinacy? Kate, hear me seriously, while I explain to you the truth."

"Not I, indeed; I am in no humour for serious talk to-day; let us give the rein to nonsense, let's indulge in nothing but absurdity; since you have begun the morning by what appears to me to be the height of both. It well suits the present occasion—your whimsical cousin Kate's birthday. Come, good people," she added, turning to the others; "if you have finished reading your letters, what say you to passing into the next room, where we shall find the last new packet of books and magazines from town?"

"And where we shall find something else, I fancy," whispered the 'Squire to Fermor Worthington, as they followed Kate, Alicia, and Cecil, into the oak-parlour, as it was called; a large, handsome apartment, which formed their principal sitting-room. "I heard the men bringing it in, the first thing this morning, before we were up. I wonder how she'll take it?" added he, with a little doubting laugh, that betrayed some anxiety.

"Let us see," said Fermor, smiling, and advancing with a firm, quick step.

Kate had scarcely entered the room, ere she perceived the important addition to its furniture. "A piano-forte!" she exclaimed. "The roc's egg! The very thing which, if I had allowed myself to indulge in princessly sighings for impossible possessions, I should have desired! The very thing of all others which, if any fairy godmother had given me my choice, I should have picked out to ask for!"

As she ran her fingers over the keys, bringing out its fine tone, and attesting its first-rate excellence, she said: "And yet, ah, you naughty uncle! Instead of letting you see my delight, I ought, I believe, to scold you, for laying out your money upon so expensive a purchase for your Kate's birthday present."

"'Tis none of mine, Kate," said her uncle.

"No!" she exclaimed, looking up in extreme surprise, which covered her face with a sudden blush, vivid, and very beautiful.

"No," replied he; "it was Fermor's thought; it is his gift."

The glow of colour still in her cheeks, and her eyes beaming with its bright effect, Kate went forward, and put her hand into Fermor's, saying:—"It is none the less welcome. I say the strongest thing I can, in saying that. I shall prize it quite as much as if it had been uncle's present."

Her manner, her words, had something of the simplicity and earnestness of a child. As a young girl, Kate had seemed older than she was, by her ability in expressing herself; and now, as a

grown woman, a certain straightforward, child-like way, that characterized her, often made her petulance and perverseness pass off more gracefully than they otherwise would have done.

Fermor Worthington held the given hand in both his, as he said:—"Thank you, Kate! Thank you, Kate! If it bring you but half the pleasure your frank acceptance has given me, the roc's egg will have kept truer promise than its original."

"And I suppose you expect me to play, with these cramped fingers?" she said, laughing, as she withdrew her hand. "How came I to venture them within the Iron Cousin's grip, knowing it of old? He lames you, and then thinks you qualified to do justice to his gift. Reasonable dealing, truly! But I'll do my best to pleasure him, for once, in spite of his iron treatment, since he has so greatly pleased me."

She sat down, and accompanied herself in the air she knew he best liked; and then rising, she begged Alicia to give them his favourite sonata, which she named.

"My dear child, I am glad that you took Fermor's gift so kindly," said her uncle to her afterwards, as she was hanging over the instrument, and letting her fingers wander caressingly and lingeringly up and down its ivory smoothness, as if its very touch were pleasant to her; "do you know, I was half afraid you mightn't approve, when you found it wasn't mine, but Fermor's."

"Why not?" said she quickly.

"Because, you know, my dear, a piano-forte costs a great deal of money; and as you've often found fault with me, when I lay out what you think too much on a present for you, I didn't know but you might object to Fermor's doing the same thing."

"Oh, I've no mercy on his pocket," laughed she; "he's made of gold—for all he's the iron cousin."

"He has a heart of gold," said the 'Squire.

"Being made of gold, the heart's included, of course," she said. "Put, you know, uncle, with regard to the costliness of the gift—had it been a piece of music that came but to a shilling or two,

"I should have accepted it; why not this? The pleasure of a gift is not in its cost; why should the difference of price occasion any hesitation in the acceptance?"

"Quite true, my Kate," said her uncle.

"Feeling too, that if I had a mind to give my cousin something I knew he liked, I should not think of the price, were it within my means. I had no difficulty in taking his present, believing that he felt just the same thing."

"Once more—thank you, thank you, Kate," said the low, earnest voice of Fermor Worthington, near to her.

"I did not know you were within hearing," she said. "But there is the comfort of always speaking as one thinks, after the fashion of your plain-spoken cousin Kate; no need to fear being overheard. Contrary to the usual fate of listeners, you have learned something that does not displease you, it seems."

"That pleases me more than I can express," said Fermor. "It has proved to me that my cousin Kate has the right-minded simplicity in her way of thinking about money-matters, which she always had; and that she does the iron cousin some justice, though she so often seems inclined to be hard upon him."

"Oh, the stickler for justice!" she exclaimed. "And pray, with whom should I be hard, if not with the iron cousin,—my own iron cousin? Nothing will make an impression on some substances, but their own equi-hardness. It is diamond cut diamond between us two."



CHAPTER XXIX.

THE piano-forte in the oak-parlour brought large addition to the pleasure of the circle at Heathcote Hall. Alicia White was untiring in her readiness to oblige her friends with as much of her really admirable playing as they desired; and they were not sparing in their demands. It was a source of genuine delight to them all, with one exception. This was Cecil Lascelles, who

cared little for instrumental music. He had great enjoyment in vocal music, and was no contemptible singer himself. He had a sweet-toned, manly, tenor voice; sang well in tune, and with good taste and expression. He was especially fond of the Italian school, both in opera and church music. While the 'Squire and Fermor Worthington got Kate to sing one of the divine airs of Handel or Mozart, and incited her to master more of them for their gratification, Cecil would lure her back to some of their old Pergola favourites, reminding her of the Prima Donna's scena in such a piece, or that bit of soft chorus in another, or that perfect trio in a third. When Miss White played—were it the finest concerto in her collection—he would sit it out merely, resigning himself to its continuance, but evidently without one spark of enjoyment. On the contrary, when Kate stumbled out, ever so imperfectly, her reminiscences of opera music, to please him, he would listen with interested attention and thorough pleasure.

She would sometimes, laughingly, bid him remember that she was avowedly no musician, and that she found it impossible to repeat all the numberless beauties he went on recalling to her memory; but he persevered, and insisted that she, "*of course*, could recollect them, if she would but try."

"I recollect them, yes; but to play them, or sing them—*altra cosa!*" she said.

One evening he ran up to his room, and returned with an armful of piano-forte scores, of different operas, which he had had sent down from town, on purpose, as he said, that she might now have no excuse, since Miss White would be so kind as to play the accompaniment for them, while they could pick out what they liked, to sing.

They went on for some evenings thus, much to Cecil's delight, turning over leaves, humming bits here and there, skipping the bravuras, leaving out the bass songs and duets, eschewing the too great difficulties, and pouncing on all the melodious passages, and favourite scraps. This heterogeneous medley was all very entertaining and charming, no doubt, to themselves, who could supply from memory and imagination the gaps that were left,

and the hiatuses that they ruthlessly made, but was much less amusing to their hearers. Miss White found means to escape from her post of accompanist, which did not at all suit her to fill, and left them to potter out for themselves, as well as they could. But this did not a whit disturb them; they were now too far entered upon the dear delight of looking through music familiar to them through pleasant remembrance; and every one who has experienced this, can understand their enjoyment.

The 'Squire—as usual, when any gratification of Kate's was in question—soon learned to accommodate himself to the change; and gave up hearing the sort of music he liked, for the sake of seeing her interested and pleased. At first, he much missed the nightly game of chess, which Cecil used to play with him; but this was supplied by Fermor Worthington, who, finding his old friend sitting beside the chess-table one evening with the pieces ready ranged, and vainly awaiting the advent of Cecil, then deeply engaged with Kate at the piano, volunteered to become the 'Squire's antagonist.

Alicia White established herself and her mother-o'-pearl work-box close beside them, with the avowed purpose of watching the game, and endeavouring to learn the moves; and thus evening after evening passed away, more satisfactorily to two of the party than to the others.

"Fermor, my boy, if I did not think you rather *allowed* me to take a few pieces just now, I should triumph in that glorious check-mate I have given you!" said the 'Squire, on one occasion. "I suppose it's too late to begin another game; and yet those two have not finished their batch of music. What cormorants your amateurs are! Never tired of their favourite morsels! But let them go on. She enjoys it; that's enough!"

"Are we never to have any more of Miss White's delightful playing, 'Squire?" said Fermor. "She is grown chary of indulging us now."

"Not in the least, I assure you. I am at all times most willing to play as much as you and the dear 'Squire like, Mr. Worthington. But—" and she looked expressively towards the instrument.

There came a pause in the music, soon after; and then Fermor Worthington went up to Kate, and said: "Miss White is kind enough to promise us a sonata this evening."

"I would not for the world disturb you, Kate, dear!" added Alicia, as she followed to the piano; "but as Mr. Worthington asked me to play, I cannot refuse."

"Certainly not; I have been very thoughtless—very forgetful," said Kate, earnestly. "We have monopolized the instrument shamefully, Cecil, in our attempts to recall bygone pleasures, and have thus neglected an actual one. We are punished for our pains, being ourselves the greatest losers; otherwise, I should apologize to you, Alicia, for my apparent rudeness."

There was something in this speech which spoiled Fermor's pleasure upon hearing Kate speak with so much sincere courtesy. He did not analyse what this something was; he did not know that it was the sound of the two little words "we" and "our" which coupled herself and Cecil in a mutual delinquency. He only felt the impression, without asking himself its source; and he was soon occupied in attending to Alicia's playing.

"I have not forgotten, my dear, that the little bird is to have his share of the pleasure he has procured us," said the 'Squire, when Alicia came to the close. "Will Huntley is passionately fond of music, as I told you; so I have asked him and Mrs. Huntley to dine with us, and spend the evening here, to-morrow, to hear you play; and I am sure you will gratify him and us with all your favourite pieces."

"With the greatest pleasure, dear 'Squire!" replied Alicia White.

Mr. Huntley was a regular country 'squire and sportsman; the only thing upon earth he really cared for, besides hunting, was music. That, he was excessively partial to, and possessed native good taste in his preference for the best of its kind. During dinner, he appeared merely the good-hearted, easy, gossiping neighbour he was; but, when evening came, and with it music, he was awakened into intelligence and enthusiasm.

His conversation was chiefly county ohit-chat with his old friend Heathcote, and an occasional good-humoured joke with the young people; whilst Mrs. Huntley was superbly affable, in purple satin and pink topazes.

"Young Braddeley is now Sir James," said Mr. Huntley. "The old Baronet's dead, and left the young 'un a mint o' money."

"I've often heard you speak of the Braddeleys, Will, but never happened to meet either father or son," said the 'Squire.

"He's a wild young chap, they say; but I've nothing to do with his morals, not being his godfather, you know; and as his dad and I were school-fellows, why, he has always been welcome, whenever he has chosen to come over and stay with us. Talking of dying rich—there's one, we know, will cut up for something handsome; I shouldn't wonder, a good round sum. Old Scrimpum, I mean; he must be a warm old codger; he's always been so cursed close and hugger-mugger; and he's made a pretty penny in his time, I'll be bound. What should you think he's worth?"

"Not a single sixpence, I should say," said Kate.

"My dear Miss Ireton! Why, he has sixteen thousand pounds in the Dingleton Bank alone, to my certain knowledge!" said Mr. Huntley.

"Oh! he's rich enough; but you ask what he's worth. Now, if you'll take my valuation—not sixpence; at least, I wouldn't give sixpence for him, the miserable animal! He refused a pound to a charitable subscription for a poor widow woman, that Dr. Meadows and uncle both asked him to contribute to," said Kate; "giving as his reason, that he didn't choose to encourage begging impostors. As if women became widows expressly to excite compassion, and impose on good nature."

Mrs. Huntley beguiled the tedious period in the drawing-room while they were taking coffee, and expecting the gentlemen from their wine, by a magnificent account of the approaching grand public ball, of which she was to be patroness, in conjunction with five other leading county ladies. "It will be quite a superior and select affair," she said. "We intend to be very particular and

exclusive in the issuing of tickets. We shall only grant them to applicants giving the most respectable and unexceptionable references."

"Meaning those who can pay for their tickets, dress creditably, and not trudge there on foot, I presume," said Kate.

"I mean, that tradespeople, and other ineligible persons, will, of course, be refused cards," said Mrs. Huntley.

"Those who can't dance, or can't enjoy society, for instance," observed Kate. "All ill-looking, lame, or crippled folks, rank among the ineligible, of course. No hump-backed, crooked, or deformed candidates need apply. No entrance given to sprained ankles. Persons in spectacles not admitted."

"Why not?" said Alicia White. "I am sure I have known some most respectable people wear spectacles. Doctors, clergymen, scientific gentlemen, blue ladies, professors of all sorts of ologies and ometries, often wear glasses; which, I think, add to respectability of appearance, instead of diminishing it."

"A pretty list of eligibles for a ball-room you have named, Alicia!" laughed Kate Ireton. "Mrs. Huntley would disdain having such a crew of old fogies at her ball."

"Ay, but I've seen very young doctors and curates, and quite juvenile blue-stockings, wear spectacles," persisted Alicia.

"That must be because they're short-sighted," said Kate; "and short-sighted people have no business in a ball-room. They only blunder about, and confuse the rest, and spoil the general pleasure—the general pleasure being Mrs. Huntley's great object."

"You do me no more than justice, my dear Miss Ireton; our chief aim is to secure the greatest possible comfort and convenience, with brilliant entertainment."

"And exclusiveness," said Kate.

"Exactly so; there is positively no enjoyment in too mixed an assembly. The only way is, to keep it very genteel and select."

"By way of ensuring the largest amount of general enjoyment. The secret of disseminating pleasure is curious. No

wonder that it takes six lady-patronesses to organize a county-ball, so that it shall produce the best effect, and give universal satisfaction."

At night, when the Huntleys were gone, Alicia White recurred to the topic, launching forth on the delights of dancing, and the charms of a gay, well-conducted ball.

"I never was at a ball in my life," said Kate. "It must be a curious scene; most amusing, for once or so."

"How coolly and philosophically you talk of it, Kate, dear! That shows you have never been to one, or you would not be so indifferent," said Alicia.

"Is it so very delightful, then?"

"Oh, the delightfulest thing upon earth! I think a ball the most charming way of spending an evening ever invented. Concerts, plays, operas, dinner-parties, are all nice—very nice indeed; but a ball is the nicest of the nice among amusements."

Next day, Cecil Lascelles came into the oak-parlour, saying he had been over to pay his respects to Mrs. Huntley, and to inquire how she had reached home.

"And on the strength of my relationship to an elderly gentleman who writes himself peer of England, and wears a coronet, the lady-patroness vouchsafed to consider me qualified to make myself possessor of these," he said, taking four cards from his pocket, and laying them before Kate Ireton. "You will, I hope, allow your uncle and myself to be your cavaliers, and give Miss White her favourite pleasure—the nicest of the nice among amusements."

"Tickets for the county ball!" exclaimed Kate, with sparkling eyes. "That will be a treat! how much I shall enjoy it! My first ball! and all the odd amusing people we shall meet. How new, how entertaining it will be!"

"Aha! our philosopheress is beginning to show her young-girl nature at the mention of her maiden ball, Miss White!" was

Cecil's gay exclamation. "Instinct is truer than reason. The dance in abstract, and the dance in actual prospect, have two very different effects."

"You mean, that the promised ball, like the mouse peeping from the wainscot in the fable, brings to light the real kitten propensity," laughed Kate.

"Precisely so," returned Cecil. "We shall have you playing tricks before a looking-glass, and running after your ball, like the vainest and giddiest young puss that ever called forth reprehension from tabby demureness."

"To be sure, Kate, dear; we all in our hearts love a ball; and for my part, I don't mind owning my folly, if it be folly, to enjoy dancing, and gay company, and a brilliant scene. And talking of that, we must not forget to order our ball-dresses. I shall write to town to Madame Colifichet, by to-day's post, and desire her to send me something distinguished and elegant; I shall merely mention colour and material, and leave the rest to her taste—for she has perfect taste, I must own. You'd better let me order you a dress of her at the same time, Kate, dear. You may safely trust it to her; she'll be sure to choose something very lovely and new; she has the last fashions from Paris, and her own style is excellent. 'Squire, you'll give me *carte blanche* for a ball-dress for Kate, won't you?"

"By no means," said Kate, quickly. "Uncle, I'll never forgive you, if you interfere with my dress. I've made up my own mind what I shall wear; and I promise you it shall be as handsome and tasteful as any ball-dress there. It shall not disgrace you; it shall be worthy of 'Squire Heathcote of Heathcote Hall's niece. Thank you very much, Alicia, for your offer; but I have a ball-dress in my eye, that shall all but rival yours. Take care it does not eclipse it."

"I have no fear of that, Kate, dear," said Miss White, with a sweet smile, serenely confident in the skill, taste, and style of Madame Colifichet. "But, at any rate, your uncle must let me order you a wreath; French flowers are really the only ones fit to put on."

"Not a spray, not a bud," said Kate, authoritatively. "Uncle, I insist upon it, that you leave me and my toilette alone, if you dare to meddle with so much as a single hair-pin, I shall know that you're afraid of trusting my word, and your Kate's taste."

"After that, my dear, I've no more to say," said her uncle.

"You promise me?" she said.

"Why, you unconscionable hussy! you expect me to trust your word, and it seems, won't trust me."

"I know you, uncle, and your tricks, of old. If I did not bind you down by a solemn contract, you'd disobey, and get Alicia to write after all, for a dress from town for me."

Her uncle smiled, and shook his head at her.

"Come, come, promise!" she said.

"Well, I do," he answered. "But mind, I shall be really angry if you're not properly dressed. I shall choose my Kate to look her best, at her first ball," he said.

"I promise, in my turn," she replied. "You yourself shall own that Kate's dress is what it ought to be; and I know how high that pledge is, knowing your uncle partiality."

The following morning, while Dawson was dressing her young lady mistress, she said: "I've found it out for you, Miss; I've discovered what Miss Ireton's dress is to be. I got it out of Mistress Martha, who was as proud as a pea-hen, because she's to have a hand in it. A pretty one she is, truly, to make up anything fit to be seen. An old-fashioned body like that, whose notions of dress must be about as novel and tasty as the Queen of Sheba's mantuamaker's 'prentice."

"Is Martha to make up Miss Ireton's dress?" asked Alicia White.

"To make it up, and to get it up, Miss. She showed me a whole bundle—big enough to fill a wash tub—of old lace, that the 'Squire had given his niece ever so long ago. It was his mo

ther's, it seems; and I leave you to judge, Miss, what sort of figure a young lady dizenod out in a parcel of dingy old yellow lace will cut. Why, she'll look like my gran'mother, of course; it's her gran'ma's lace, and a pretty granny she'll make of herself."

"But if Martha is to get it up, it won't be yellow or dingy any longer; and I know that old Mrs. Heathcote was celebrated for the fineness and beauty of her laces," said Miss White. "I've heard mamma say she was noted for wearing the most delicate and valuable lace in the county; no duchess could own richer Mechlin and Brussels. If, after all, her dress should be so very handsome and becoming!" muttered Miss White, musingly. "She seemed to make sure of it."

"No fear, Miss," answered the ready Dawson. "Think of the way it'll be put together. No taste, no style, no nothing. Take my word for it, Miss, it'll look like a morning wrapper,—all heavy and dead, like. Not a bit airy and lightsome, and what a ball dress should be. Think of your own sky-blue crape, Miss, with the bookies of snow-drops, and the wreath to match; and then, just picter to yourself the difference. Why, you'll look as if you'd just stepped out of last month's Mode-book—the very pink of elegance and fashion; while Miss Ireton, poor thing! will look for all the world like a ghost in a white sheet."

"I should be sorry for that, Dawson," said her mistress. "You don't suppose I wish to outshine Miss Ireton, or would take pleasure in seeing her appear to disadvantage?"

"Certainly not, Miss," said the acquiescent tire-woman. "Only, whether you wish it or no, you will outshine her, and all of 'em, as sure as my name's Eliza Dawson. See if you don't, that's all. I only wish I could be there to see it too, and to see how a certain gentleman, who owns a park nearer here than Hyde Park, will show he thinks so, even if he don't say so; though it's my opinion he will. Full dress often brings on a declaration, that every day dress has kept fluttering and shilly-shallying upon a man's lips for weeks and weeks. Silks and muslins may win hearts; but commend me to blonde, gauze, and crape, for bringing matters to a crisis. Walking-dresses and dinner-dresses d-

very well for falling in love with; but a ball-dress for popping the question."

"Why, you silly Dawson! what is your head running upon?" said her mistress.

"Never mind, Miss; what I know, I know. All I say is, if a gentleman has any eyes in his head, or heart in his bosom, much less any mind to a particular lady, he won't be able to resist the sky-blue and snow-drops, mark my words."

CHAPTER XXX.

"WHERE have you been this age past, Mr. Worthington?" said Alicia White, as Fermor made his appearance at Heathcote Hall one afternoon, within a day or two of that on which the ball was to take place. "We have missed you dreadfully in all our preparations."

"And what may those be? Is the 'Squire going to have another musical party, or give a gala in the grounds, or a ball?"

"You burn, as the children say," laughed Kate. "There is a ball in view, but not at Heathcote. The county ball. Haven't you heard of it?"

"A public ball! you are not going, Kate?"

"Indeed I am, cousin of the iron-grave countenance. Cecil brought us each tickets; and we are going in a pleasant party—uncle and all."

"Unless my confounded rheumatism takes it into its head to prevent me," said the 'Squire. "I've had a touch of it lately. I felt a twinge or two this morning. But I trust it won't be so savage as to tie me by the leg on the night of the ball, for I've set my heart upon seeing my little girl shine out in all her finery, and am determined to go, if I can possibly hobble."

"And we count upon you, Mr. Worthington, for a third gentleman. The more cavaliers in our train, the greater the

honour to Kate and me. We shall be the envy of the room, said Miss White.

"And I have resolved to dance my first set, at my first ball, with no other partner than the doughty Iron Cousin himself," exclaimed Kate.

"The girls are determined to spoil you, Fermor, my boy," said the 'Squire. "They are actually engaging you to dance with them; and they've neither of them asked me yet."

"Ay, but I mean to monopolize you for the greater part of the evening, uncle; mind that," said Kate. "If you dance, you dance with me, remember."

"If I dance, you saucy baggage, you! See whether I won't show you what a partner Harry Heathcote once made. Why, he was reckoned the best hand at a cotillon in all the county round."

"Or the best foot, uncle? Truly, it is a dapper, comely, neat-made one to look at," she said, stooping down, and playfully caressing his trim instep. "If the feet footed it as featly as they themselves are shapely, no wonder their dancing exploits were famed."

"And will you come over and join us, Fermor, or shall you go straight from Worthington?" asked the 'Squire.

"I? I am not going," replied Fermor, quietly.

"Not going!" repeated Kate.

"Not going, Mr. Worthington!" echoed Alicia, dolefully and deprecatingly.

"No," he answered. "Many things will prevent me; there are more than one strong objection to my going."

"And what may be the worshipful Iron Cousin's 'strong objections?' May one know them? Sublime in reason, irrefragably right, doubtless," said Kate.

"In the first place, I inherit a great distaste, an aversion, towards all public balls. One, whose opinions had naturally much weight with me, not unfrequently declared that no daughter of his should ever set foot in an assembly of the kind. He averred that a woman's delicacy was exposed to undue probation

in such a scene. He said that she was either compelled to dance with the first stranger who chose to get presented by the Master of the Ceremonies; or found herself under the necessity of seeming haughty, proud, imperious, by refusal. I confess, I so far share my father's feelings on this point, that it would give me pain to see any woman I felt an interest in reduced to such an alternative—subjected to a similar dilemma."

The thought crossed Kate's mind, whether Mr. Morton Worthington's dislike to public balls might not have arisen out of the circumstance of her own mother's having met the man whom she preferred to him at one of them; but she only laughed, as she said:—"Your family creed probably includes that dogma of the fastidious gentleman in Sheridan's comedy; who maintains that there's only one man a truly modest woman ought to have for a partner, while the rest of the couples should be made up of her great-aunts and uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers."

"But the way to ensure having only one's proper partners, one's chosen partners," said Alicia White, "is to go with one's own party; which is precisely what we hope to do. We depend upon you, Mr. Worthington, on this very account. If you accompany us, we have our own set among ourselves."

"Pardon me, you cannot depend upon me; since the 'Squire has announced his intention of dancing," he replied. "You would not pay 'Squire Heathcote so bad a compliment, as to allow him to suppose that he is not a partner you would favour?"

"I shall be only too much honoured, if the dear 'Squire will be mine," said Alicia White; "still I——"

"Still she would be very well contented to have a partner extra, in case the elderly one should find he is not quite so untiring a dancer as of yore," said the 'Squire. "Come, Fermor, my good fellow; don't play the austere old gentleman, while I'm about to play the fool and the juvenile. If it be only to keep one in countenance, consent to forego your grave notions of right and wrong, for once in a way."

"Do you think I should require pressing and persuation,

if I could comply, my dear 'Squire?" said Fexmer Worthington. "Ask yourself, if my sable habit be a fit costume for a ball-room."

"Many people in mourning go to balls, and dance too," said Alicia White.

"I do not blame them; they have a perfect right to do so, if no sentiment or feeling prompt them to stay away. But for my part, a person in deep mourning in a ball-room, always strikes me as an anomaly—a mockery—a heartless inconsistency—a shock to that respect and sacredness belonging to the memento of a sorrow common to us all. Besides, not to dwell too seriously upon what are, after all, only my own peculiar whims of feeling upon the subject, there is another impediment to my forming one of your party at this ball; it takes place the day after to-morrow, which is Thursday."

"And do the Iron Cousin's freaks of superstition set a bar upon poor Thursday, in the same way that popular superstition repudiates Friday?" asked Kate.

"No," he replied. "I thought you knew, Kate, that my Thursdays are always engaged."

"Oh, you mean that, in your usual self-addiction to disagreeables, you have made a point of dedicating each Thursday to the hilarity of Ditchley Manor; to the lively task of playing backgammon through a whole evening with Sir Dullarton—the wearisomest of mortal men—a very slough and bog of tedious humanity."

"Sir Dullarton proved himself a kind and zealous friend of my father's, in a strait, when he had not a soul else to aid him; he once, by a curious chance, saved his life in a street-brawl at Palermo. My father never forgot the debt—nor will his son. He forgave him his constitutional slowness and dullness, for the sake of his proved active goodness. My father found that, by granting him his own society, he could best gratify his friend, and return the obligation he owed him; and when himself was taken away, he left me to supply his place with the poor resourceless knight. I would not fail in this for any consideration. I look upon him in the light of a direct bequest."

"And a remarkably unpleasant legacy he is!" said Kate.

Like many a legacy—brings more trouble and fuss than he's worth; more of a tie and a burden, than benefit or advantage."

"That is less generously said, than Kate's usual words," observed Fermor. "She does not ordinarily show gain to be her sole consideration, in the view she takes of a circumstance. If she consult her own natural feeling, she will comprehend that neither benefit nor advantage—to *myself*, are my object in appropriating Thursdays to Sir Dullarton and Ditchley Manor."

"But, Mr. Worthington, you have not, after all, told us what was the pursuit which detained you so long away from us at Heathcote, where you have been greatly missed," said the smooth voice of Alicia White, gliding in upon the somewhat awkward pause that followed Fermor's last speech. "You must show us that it was something very amusing, or very engrossing, which deprived us of the pleasure of your company, if you would have us forgive you."

"Nothing more amusing than trying to gain a voice in a humdrum Committee, and obtain a seat among a dry board of Directors," smiled Fermor.

"Am I not right in saying that the Iron Cousin has a special passion for disagreeables?" laughed Kate. "Who but himself would have found out such a mode of spending his time, by way of amusement; and setting his heart upon such things, by way of delights? To be sure, there is the zest of trying to conquer difficulties, master impracticabilities, and obtain impossibilities,—a charm in itself to an iron disposition. And of course you have carried your point?"

"On the contrary, have been utterly foiled," replied he.

"Evviva!" she exclaimed. "Tell us the particulars. This is indeed something worth hearing! The Iron Cousin defeated! Enchanting!"

"Kate, Kate!" said Miss White, in a soft, deprecating tone; then turning to Fermor, she added: "Yes, Mr. Worthington, pray do tell us all about it, we shall all sympathize with your

mortification, though this naughty, cruel creature pretends to rejoice."

"No great mortification; neither my pride, nor my vanity nor my dignity, were interested in the matter," said Fermor "I was merely anxious to secure this Directorship, that I might endeavour to remove a person from an office she is unfit to fill. You remember 'Lemon-face,' Kate?"

"Quite well," she answered. "Was it the School-Committee you were trying to gain a place in?"

"Yes; the vacancy occurred among the Directors, and I applied to become one. But this morning the election was decided against me; and I came here to console myself for my disappointment."

"And instead of consolation, met with mockery and wicked ridicule. Fie, Kate! I'm shocked at your wildness of raillery, which spares nobody; you witty, wilful thing, you!" said Alicia White, sweetly.

"Kate deals sharp words as other ladies give taps of the fan," laughed Cecil. "She hits you a blow with her tongue, as they bestow raps o' the knuckles. Some women wound with unkind looks, some with sly, back-biting hints, and malicious whispered inuendoes; but Kate gives honest, overt, broad-sword cuts, in broad daylight. How runs the passage?"

"She gives the bastinado with her tongue,
Our ears are cudgel'd; not a word of hers,
But buffets better than a fist of might;
We are bethump'd with words——"

perhaps, yet we have an open, handsome enemy, who makes no pretence of soft hitting."

"Thanks, good ally," said Kate. "You are a staunch champion and bold defender. As for my broad-sword exercise my rapier play, it moves the Iron Cousin no jot:—"

"On him, when pertness is satiric,
He takes it for a panegyric."

"It would require Conceit itself to discern panegyric in Kate's sarcasm," replied Fermor. "Dull iron, conscious of no other claim to distinction than solidity and firmness—a certain sober virtue and value of its own, in usefulness and reliability, cannot hope to find anything very flattering to its self-love, beneath the gay taunts that are perpetually flung at its grim heaviness."

"You show how perfectly equal it is to rebuff the light attacks of steel," she answered.

"Highly-polished and well-tempered as that steel is," he returned, "were it less bright, or less fine of temper, it would be hardly bearable."

"If it were not true steel—good in temper, it would snap, cousin mine; and you could not endure snappishness? Tell me, whenever my speech shall degenerate into anything so contemptible," she said. "And now, Alicia, give us one of your most delicious adagios, to take the taste of all this out of our mouths."

The day of the ball arrived. But with it came a sharpened attack of the 'Squire's enemy, rheumatism; and when he made his appearance in the breakfast-room, supported by his old servant, Robert, he was compelled to confess that he must give up all hope of accompanying them that evening.

Miss White could not conceal her chagrin; Cecil looked disconcerted; while Kate hastened to arrange her uncle's arm-chair comfortably for him, and place a soft hassock beneath his feet.

"My dear girls you shall not be disappointed; I have thought of an excellent plan for your proper escort. Kate, my dear, get pen and ink, and write a note for me to *Mrs.* Huntley. I mean to ask her to call here in her carriage for you and Alicia, and Cecil. There will be plenty of room, for I know Will Huntley intends going over in the phaeton, early; and as the Hall lies in her way, I shall not put his wife to any inconvenience in requesting her to fetch you. All for the best, you see, girls! You'll have the glory of making your entry, under the wing of the principal Lady-Patroness."

The note was written and despatched; and then Alicia White called upon Kate to take it in turn to entertain the 'Squire with as much music as he pleased, in requital for his kind arrangement. The morning passed thus, contentedly and pleasantly; and immediately after the earlier dinner, which the 'Squire had ordered purposely to give them plenty of time to beautify, as he said, he despatched them both to their dressing-rooms, bidding them come and let him have the pleasure of seeing them in their full blaze of adornment, before Mrs. Huntley's carriage should arrive.

"And as the process of Adonizing and Narcissusizing does not require so much time as that of Venusizing and Hebeizing," said Cecil, "your uncle and I will have a game of chess together, Kate, while you ladies take an hour or two's start of me."

"Here's a secure Hippomenes for you!" she cried. "He yields his first vantage-step to his pair of Atalantas, secure in his own golden apples of conquering array, when once he shall have donned it."

"Remember, Hippomenes won the race!" said Cecil, looking after Kate, as she left the room; and when the door closed upon the beautiful vanishing form, he muttered: "And succeeded in winning Atalanta from her vow never to love, or listen to lover."

"Cecil, you are playing carelessly," said the 'Squire; "your thoughts are not upon the game; they are upon pumps and silk stockings, the sit of your coat, or the fit of your waistcoat. Why is not Kate here to help me to tease you about your anxiety to look killing to-night?"

"Pardon me; I'm all attention. I see, your queen's in danger. You don't perceive how my bold knight is advancing towards her."

"Ay, but here's a trusty 'squire, in the shape of a sturdy little pawn, at hand to rescue her, and keep her safe. I can't part with my queen. I lose all in losing her."

There was something in his old friend's words that threw Cecil into another fit of musing. His absence of mind became at length so evident, that the 'Squire, sweeping his hand over the board, and bursting into a laugh, said: "There! Away with you

"I see you're dying to be off to your room and get ready. Very natural! It isn't so long ago, but I can remember how a young fellow feels within an hour or two of a pleasant dance. I used to be all impatience myself, and thought dressing brought the time nearer. Boyish enough, perhaps; but some of our boy feelings are not the least pleasant ones to look back upon. Off with you, Cecil! I'll put by the chess-men."

The 'Squire, as he dropped the pieces into their box, said, smilingly, to himself: "Odd enough!" And then he turned round, and sat looking into the fire, dreaming of a time when he dressed to go to just such a ball, at the same assembly-room, with his head and heart full of meeting this young fellow's mother, then a blooming girl, and himself no older than her son was now.

He was still lost in quiet reverie, when the door opened, and a white vision stole in. It came forward, on noiseless foot, radiant and beaming, and stood before him, smiling in his face, while innocent pleasure and glad consciousness sparkled from the eyes, and played round the lips.

"My Kate! My dear, beautiful girl!" exclaimed the 'Squire, in a sort of irrepressible transport.

She did, indeed, look very beautiful. Her own artistic eye and native taste had devised a robe, more graceful than any mere fashionable dress-maker's conventionality would have produced; and yet it sufficiently adhered to the mode then worn to preserve it from affectation of originality or singularity. The richness and delicacy of the material was exhibited to the best advantage; the soft lace hung cloudily and transparently around her, assorting admirably with the brilliancy and bloom of her complexion, and the graceful lightness of her figure. Amongst her luxuriant hair were arranged some blossoms of a choice heath, which had lately been sent by Fermor from the Worthington conservatory to the 'Squire; the pure, waxen flowers, blending perfectly with the snowy texture of her dress.

At her uncle's words, Kate threw herself into his arms and gave him a hearty, laughing hug; and then knelt upon the cushion at his feet, that he might look at her at his ease.

"Do you know that you are paying my good looks a poor compliment, in allowing that full-dress makes me beautiful?" she said. "You never called me so in my morning-frocks, or my riding-habit, and, therefore, I must needs believe that it is only the gown which turns me into a beauty."

"If I haven't spoken my thought before, it is not because it wasn't in my mind," said the 'Squire. "I have often called you my own beautiful Kate to myself; but the sight of you in that pretty dancing-dress, showing your white throat and white arms—of a still more fair white than your dress, for they have life, and health; and glow in them—forced the word from my lips. I know it's thought very foolish and very wrong to praise young girls to their face, or to let them know they're beauties; but still I have no fear, somehow, of making you vain, my Kate."

"In short, in your eyes, I'm perfect, morally and bodily, dear uncle! I know that; but it isn't unpleasant to hear it said out, too—by *you*."

"Ay, but you'll have to bear its being said by others, also," said the 'Squire, with a little sigh. "It isn't to be supposed but what all those young fellows at the ball to-night will see that which is plain enough to an old fellow like me—that you really are very handsome, my Kate. I wish I were going with you, to see how you'll be admired; and yet I don't know that I should altogether like to see it, either."

He sighed again, as he stroked back her hair from her fair young brow, and leaned forward, and kissed it softly and fondly. Then he took her in his arms, and folded her to his breast, as he said: "I love you too truly, too deeply, Kate, to care whether you are admired or no. This is very selfish, I know, but I can't help it."

"It is exactly my own feeling, uncle; so that I have your love, what do I want with admiration?"

"Nevertheless, you will have it—you can't help that," said the 'Squire. "No one will look upon you to-night but will acknowledge——But I am forgetting, and spoiling all Matty's careful handiwork, and ruffling your smooth, glossy curls, and

rumpling your pretty dress," he added, drawing back in some dismay, at perceiving that his caresses were certainly deranging the order of her attire.

"No matter; ruffle and rumple as you will, uncle mine! I dressed for you. It is all yours to admire and do as you please with. Have I not kept my promise? Is it not a ball-dress for a queen—nay, even for your niece, your Kate? I had a pride in its consisting of that exquisite lace you gave me of grand-mamma's, and in its being all your own girl's planning, and Matty's making, under my careful superintendence. Have we not been skilful milliners?"

"I'm no great judge of millinery, my dear; but to me it seems perfect. However, we'll ask Cecil and Alicia. She really is a judge of these things."

"I'm quite contented with your judgment, uncle; if you are satisfied, I am—completely."

"But now get up, my dear, and put yourself to rights in the glass a little. I must have you quite neat and ready against Mrs. Huntley comes for you."

"Plenty of time, uncle! Don't drive me away; I'm very happy here."

"Drive you away, my Kate! I only wish I could keep you by me till I sent you from me. You'd stand a chance of having no ball—no dancing to-night, I fear."

Kate clapped her hands. "The very thing I wanted you to say, uncle! I mean to stay with you; and I know you'll neither send me from you, nor drive me away, when I tell you I wish to remain."

"Remain at home! Give up the ball—your first ball! No, my Kate; that shall not be. You must not make me utterly selfish. I know you wish to stay at home on my account: that is treating me like a spoiled child—a baby—one who cannot bear to see himself deprived of a pleasure."

"On the contrary, uncle, I ask you to grant me a pleasure, and you have never refused me one yet. It is you who have spoiled me you know; and you are not going to begin now to be

harsh, and unkind, and severe, and refuse me my way, and unspoil me, are you ? ”

“ You coaxing little villain ! this is how you always get the better of me ! ” said the ’Squire, pinching her cheek, as she leaned upon his lap, and looked into his face.

“ What is Kate, as usual, beguiling you out of ’Squire ? ” said Cecil, as he entered. “ She succeeds in overcoming all your sternest decrees, subduing all your strictest resolves, knocking down all your most fixed measures. How is it that, sovereign man as you are, you do not better know how to quell such a rebel traitress as that ? She lies at your foot ; you have nothing to do but spurn her from you—nothing sooner done ; nothing more easy. Try.”

“ You would’t say it’s so easy, were you in my place, Cecil. It’s just the very thing I can’t do. I feel I ought to insist, and yet I have no more heart to do it than—than—than you would have. Once that hussy asks me to grant her anything, and it’s all over with my power to refuse.”

“ Be a man, ’Squire ! Exercise your masculine prerogative ; say ‘ No,’ boldly, to that confident, smiling, upturned face, looking so assured in its insolent sense of power ; trample on that pleading, kneeling grace, which assumes a lowly attitude only the better to manifest its haughty consciousness of triumph ! Call up all your manliness ! She lies prone before you, temptingly ready ; strike, and vanquish ! What mercy does an arch-insurgent like that deserve ? Does she not look smilingly, mischievously secure ? The sight is enough to drive a man out of his senses with—with—impatience. No wonder you are out of patience, ’Squire, at her defiant witchery—her irresistible wiles.”

“ I know I ought to resist her, when she wants to coax me into letting her remain with me,” said the ’Squire ; “ but, somehow, I always give way, however I may mean to stick to my point, with Kate.”

“ Of course you do, like a good, dutiful uncle. You consent and I stay at home this evening.”

"Stay at home!" exclaimed Cecil, a blank look suddenly taking place of his former vivacity and excitement.

"Yes," said Kate, quietly.

"Then so will I," said Cecil, hastily.

"That you will not, Cecil," said Kate. "You would not be so rude to Miss White."

"Hang Miss White! I beg her pardon; but I do not care for dancing with her, and I do care for dancing with you, Kate. I had set my heart upon—I had made up my mind to——"

"And now you must make up your mind to oblige me, Cecil," she said. "I am sure you will not refuse, when I tell you it will really oblige me if you go, and seriously disoblige me if you stay."

He bit his lip; turned away, and beat his fingers vexedly upon the table.

"You now see what I said is true, that it's not so easy to deny this little baggage anything, when she chooses to ask," laughed the 'Squire. "There's no resisting her. I've long felt it; and you're beginning to find it out, too."

"I am, indeed," muttered Cecil.

Miss White now made her appearance, looking precisely as her maid had predicted she would—just as if she had stepped out of a fashion-book, point-device from top to toe. When the blue crape and snowdrops had received their due meed of admiration, Alicia exclaimed: "But, my goodness! Kate, dear, how are you muddling your dress upon that hearth-rug. Those beautiful flounces! What magnificent wide lace! Like a cobweb, so delicately fine. But you are positively ruining them, couching down there. They'll be so crushed—not fit to be seen when you reach the ball-room."

"Then, I'd better not go there at all; and that's exactly what I mean to do," said Kate.

"Not go! give up the ball!" exclaimed Miss White. "But why did you dress, then?"

"For a whim of my own," laughed Kate.

"And you stay at home for a whim, too? Really you are a

most whimsical creature, altogether, Kate, dear. I can't half understand you."

"Most likely not," she said; "and yet there's nothing very abstruse about me; I'm as plain to be read as A, B, C."

"The most unlearned of scholars could make out that fair text; its lines are legible enough, though only a dunce would call them plain," said Cecil.

"Don't waste your smart speeches before your time, Cecil," laughed Kate. "Keep compliments for the ball-room; your gallantry will have need of as many of them as you can muster. They'll be quite in place there, and expected from you; but here, they're thrown away."

"Hark! there's the carriage!" cried Miss White. "Think better of it, Kate, and go with us." And she ran to the window.

"Do, Kate," said Cecil, leaning down to her, and speaking the words low and earnestly.

"Am I to oblige you, or you me?" she said, playfully.

"I prefer your wishes even to my own," he said, in a tone, the meaning inflection of which was lost upon her.

"Be it as you will, Kate."

"I knew you would not deny me, Cecil. You have always been obliging and kind, ever since we have known each other," and she laid her hand upon his, in a simple, affectionate manner,—as a child,—a sister.—might have done, to a good-natured brother who humoured her girlish wishes. "And now go and perform your duty of cavalier to Miss White; put on her shawl for her, and lead her down to the carriage."

Cecil started from his chair, and again ground something between his teeth, in which Miss White's name was audible, with a word of one syllable before it—inarticulate, but which did not sound as if it invoked precisely a blessing upon her head.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"AND now, uncle, tell me a story, while I wind this skein of sewing-silk to mend my riding-gloves with. I spied a very disreputable hole or two in them when I was last out with you," said Kate.

"How am I to tell you a story, who have read so few?" said the 'Squire.

"The very reason, uncle. Your best story-tellers are those who look upon life, instead of into books. There's Matty, who I fancy has never looked into more than one book in the whole course of her existence; she's a capital teller of a long tale. I often get her to amuse me with some of hers."

"But I've little observation, and no invention," said the 'Squire. "I may have seen life, but I can hardly be said to have made much out of it, or drawn much from it. I'm nothing of a critic or a judge, I take things pretty much as they come to me, and I've always found them turn out very pleasantly; perhaps more so than if I'd spied and spied into their causes, their reasons, or their natures, and asked myself a dozen troublesome questions as to why I liked them, and whether I liked them at all. I've had a very quiet peaceful life, thank God! and a very happy one, thanks to the little girl He has given me. It's a curious point of time in a man's life, by-the-bye, when he first finds himself talking of it in the past tense as a thing passed through, spent, gone; instead of the eager, forward look he gives to it, so long as he can speak of it as something to come, to be turned to profit, to be improved, and worthily enjoyed. Yet though a touch of sadness accompanies this first viewing life in retrospect, it is not without its satisfaction, if self-reproach be not there. That embitters all, indeed! No source of gratitude deeper than to have been spared that fearful pang. All may be better borne, and better remedied."

"Few men can have more cause for that gratitude than you, my uncle," said Kate.

"I may not have been among the most erring," said the 'Squire; "but I have had few temptations, few difficulties, few trials; therefore what might be virtue in one sorely tried and sorely tempted, is in me bare negative guiltlessness. Still, to have been suffered to be guiltless, while so many helpless creatures have been led into sin by misfortunes and misery, by evil teaching, and by want of teaching, by example, and by temperament, is a never-ceasing occasion for fervent, humble, happy thanks, offered within my own heart to Him who appointed my lot, and made me what I am."

Kate bent her face upon the hand resting on her uncle's knee, and reverently kissed its veined and wrinkled surface.

"This is but grave talk for my Kate on what should have been her first gay ball-night," said the 'Squire, cheerfully, though his tone had been placidly cheerful all along.

"And do you think I am not greatly happier thus?" she said. "Gaiety is pleasant, but happiness is better still."

At this moment the room-door opened, and Fermor Worthington entered.

"Fermor!" exclaimed the 'Squire.

"You!" exclaimed Kate.

"Nay, '*you*,' Kate! you here!" he returned, in the same voice of surprise. "I thought this was the night of the county ball."

"And so it is; yet I am here, you see," she replied.

"Though I see, I can scarcely believe," he said, standing close beside her, as she knelt there, still couched upon the rug, at her uncle's feet. "That dress, too! How comes it that you are not already gone?"

"Don't you see I'm seized with a notable fit," she said, holding up the card upon which she was winding the silk. "Here, hold the skein, and make yourself useful, too. Is not this much wiser, and safer, and *gooder*, now, than going to an idle, silly, wicked ball, losing one's time, and risking one's——what is it?"

Oh, I remember—one's 'delicacy.' Now, why do you smile? You should look grave, and pretty-behaved, and proper, as I do, and as you generally do."

"Why, this is the poor ball-ticket, degraded into a silk-winder!" he said.

"Yes, it was discarded, no longer a card available for its original naughty, foolish purpose; so I made it serve my whim for turning everything to useful profit, and wisdom, and sobriety, this evening."

"And this is a very sober dress you have chosen to play sobriety and usefulness in. It is fitted rather to rout sober thoughts, and to substitute I know not what idle ones. Is it quite wise to wear it?"

"Do you wish me to change it—to put on a soberer one?" she asked.

He was not attending to what she said.

"Is it quite in your professed spirit of wisdom and propriety, to wear such a dress to sit at home and work in, to sit upon the floor in, to play the Cinderella in? Will not the white dress be sullied, or the purer and fairer white be scorched?" he added.

"Does the fire scorch your neck, your arms, my Kate?" said the 'Squire.

"If you think they run any risk, uncle, I'll send for a shawl," she said.

"I think it would be a pity to cover up that pretty dress, my dear, don't you, Fermor?"

"What do *you* think, uncle? *Your* opinion suffices me."

"I think you can just as well draw back a little from the heat of the fire, if you find it too much for you," said the 'Squire. "It is not every one, like myself, that can bear a fire nearly all the year round."

Kate withdrew, as he suggested, seating herself upon a low stool by the side of his arm-chair, and just within its shadow.

"The Iron Cousin has not told us how it chanced that we are favoured with his unexpected apparition at Heathcote this Thursday evening," she said.

"Sir Dullarton sent over word that he should not expect me to-night, having an appointment with a gentleman from town on business; and as I happened to learn that another rheumatic embargo had been laid on your liberty, 'Squire, in consequence of which you would be unable to leave the house, I came over to play a game of chess with you."

"Thank you kindly, my dear fellow, for your thought of me. What a fortunate petted old chap I am, to have two such hearts to spoil me! Here's Kate, stayed at home to take care of me, and make me comfortable, and amuse me, dressing all the same, that I might see how she would have looked; and here are you, Fermor, come to see after me, and keep me company, lest I should be lonely."

"Kate gave up the ball for your sake! I knew there was some such motive beneath her pretended whim," exclaimed Fermor, in his ardent voice.

"So you can't give me credit for even a passing fit of notability, or prudence, or wisdom, or any one thing decent," smiled Kate.

The voice lowered into still deeper ardour, with a tremulous breath that increased rather than abated its earnestness, as Fermor said, "I would fain give you credit for—I could almost believe, that yet another reason had its share in inducing you to stay away from this dance, this public ball, Kate. Am I hoping too much? you thought of me—of my words?"

That tone, as usual, went straight to her heart; and as usual, the strength of appeal roused her spirit of resistance against the emotion, as well as her perverseness towards him who caused it.

"You deem it too incredible a hope that I should be swayed by anything approaching to right or reason," she answered lightly. "You are wise; never presume too much upon your cousin Kate's listening to either, for a longer space than it takes to think of a wilful rejoinder. And so you dreamed that your worship's iron opinions, backed by one in posthumous marble weighed with me."

"Kate," said Fermor Worthington, almost sternly, "as many taunts as you please, to myself; but I will not suffer so much as the hint of one towards him who is gone. When he was alive, I would never permit him to be the object of your vivacity of speech; now that he is dead, be assured I will still less endure it."

"And you believe that granite influence is to hold its primitive force unchanged, over others as well as yourself? If you, as a dutiful son, think it necessary to allow this cold, dark shadow to exercise its ascendancy over your actions, why should any one else think themselves bound to the same observance? Especially, so mercurial and flighty a creature as myself. Do not believe it, cousin mine; I hold myself fairly and freely excused."

Fermor turned away; and in his calm, self-contained manner, asked 'Squire Heathcote if he would let him set the chess-board.

"Eh? What, my dear fellow? Really, I believe I was almost dozing off into a nap, while you've been helping Kate to wind her skein; but since it's finished, we'll have a battle. Let's see, whose was the last game between us? Mine, I think."

When Alicia White and Cecil Lascelles came back from the ball, they found the party thus quietly seated; the 'Squire and Fermor still deep in chess, Kate engaged with a book.

Miss White, in high spirits with her evening—during which she had shone as an undoubted county belle, attired in a style to show her father's riches and consequence, and her own supremely fashionable taste—was wakeful, talkative, gay, and coquettish. She seemed inclined to indulge still the vein inspired by the scene of the last few hours; and Fermor Worthington became the subject of all her engaging attacks, and winning blandishments of sweet words, soft looks, and pretty speech, under cover of telling the 'Squire all the particulars of the delightful dance.

"Not that I should have felt so reluctant to leave it, and . . .

comply with Mr. Lascelles' broad hints that he was ready to come away whenever I pleased, and his scarcely polite eagerness to show how willing he was to return, had I known who was here," she said, with a significant glance. "But I thought that there was no chance of our seeing you at Heathcote this evening."

Fermor quietly explained the reason of his not being at Ditchley Manor; and then added: "Your cavalier was less attentive than his fair partner had a right to expect, then?"

"Nay, I expect nothing, I exact nothing from Mr. Lascelles; his courtesies are perfectly indifferent to me," said Miss White.

"But common gallantry required that he should pay sufficient attention to the lady whose escort he was, for the evening," smiled Fermor. "Cecil Lascelles is generally not wanting in such observances. No one more prompt in fulfilling the ordinary matter-of-course politenesses of society than he. I cannot think what could possess him to fail on such an occasion as this, when his assiduities were especially demanded. No wonder you complain. Shall I call him to account for his remissness?"

"You are laughing at me, Mr. Worthington; but I assure you I neither looked for his attentions, nor felt hurt at not having them; still less 'complained' of him. I only wondered at his caring so little for the charming ball. It really was a charming ball; and would have been perfect, if—if—one other partner had been there."

"Ay, the poor 'Squire's attack was vexatiously timed, to prevent him from enjoying the dance he had looked forward to," said Fermor. "But he and I have passed anything but a dull evening together, thanks to the interest of a game that has held whole nations breathless while a match was pending."

"And only think of Kate's giving up her first ball for a fancy to stay at home and finish a book she was absorbed in. Dressed and all! Yet at the last moment she would not go, because she remembered an exciting third volume she had to read. I couldn't make out the whim she talked of, then; but now I understand. It was doubtless that book."

As Miss White looked towards Kate, she thought she now also understood why Cecil Lascelles had been so indifferent about the ball, and so eager to leave it. With his elbow touching the back of Kate's chair, he was leaning over the book she held, and talking to her in a low voice of what she was reading.

"Kate might strike a stranger as capricious and whimsical, and odd-tempered, and a little wilful; she might seem so to those who know her less intimately than we do," continued Alicia White, speaking pityingly and considerately; "but by us, who are aware how immensely she has been spoiled, how invariably our dear old friend the 'Squire has indulged her, and given way to her, it is hardly to be wondered at—we can make allowance. She is a dear, sprightly, delightful creature,—with all her faults!"

"All her faults!" exclaimed Fermor.

"Her one fault, I should say; which is quite to be forgiven, considering how it has arisen. In spite of it, Kate is really a very nice girl!"

"She's——" Whatever Fermor Worthington might have been about to say, he checked himself suddenly; and picking up a glove Miss White had dropped, presented it to her.

As she drew it on, one of her numerous bracelets came unclasped; and after an ineffectual attempt to re-snap it herself, she held forth her arm to Fermor, saying:—"Will you be kind enough to fasten this troublesome clasp for me? I cannot succeed in making it meet."

"Pity the Iron Cousin did not repair to the Assembly-Room, instead of coming here, when he got leave of absence from Ditchley Manor this evening," said Kate Ireton, raising her eyes from her volume for the first time since she had taken it up. "Think of the loss to the young lady-dancers! What an acquisition so much gallantry and assiduity would have been to them! Who could have believed the rude, rough metal so capable of playing the part of partner? Who would have imagined it so calculated to shine? Who believed it so well versed

in carpet duties, and accomplished in ball-room offices and qualifications?"

"You have made a slip in your figure, Kate," laughed Cecil; "chalked floors, not carpets, are usual for ball-rooms."

"No matter for a slip in the figure, since I am not dancing," returned she. "Had I been at the ball, I must have minded what I was about. There's the superiority of home. One may say and do just what one pleases. A trip of the tongue, or of the foot, brings no ill consequences; a false metaphor, or a light word, pass unheeded in one's own room, and with one's own friends; whilst abroad, in company, the least false step, the merest heedless movement, may have its harmful effect."

"Ball-room associates demand nothing beyond graceful carriage and good dancing," observed Fermor, with his grave smile; "home-friends look for something higher and better."

"And so neither watch for failure, nor spy out deficiencies," she retorted. "Uncle mine, you are nodding off again. No wonder; these late hours will not do for us stay-at homes. I'll ring for Robert, and the chamber candles; and we'll wish our guests good night and good rest."



CHAPTER XXXII.

It was late the next morning, when the party assembled at breakfast.

"Mr. Worthington, although you cannot plead the fatigue of last night's ball as an excuse, yet I think you are suffering from headache this morning," said Alicia White.

"I am sorry to be looking so ill as to warrant the imputation," he answered, smiling.

Kate was bending over her uncle's chair, arranging cushions; so that the slight start, and furtive glance towards Fermor's face at Miss White's words, were unseen.

"Although you will not own it, yet I am persuaded it is the case," continued the latter. You gentlemen are much too brave and manly, and indifferent to pain, ever to admit you ail any thing, until you are compelled to own yourself downright indisposed. You are pale, and your eyes have that heavy look which I know means headache. I've been too accustomed to watch poor dear papa's looks, and find out when he has one of his bad headaches, for me to be mistaken in the signs."

"Since you pronounce me ill, and determine to make me an invalid, whether I will or not, I suppose I must submit to your fiat," said Fermor composedly, showing as little as he could of the annoyance with which he found himself and his looks the theme of Miss White's observations, and the subject of general remark.

"That is right," she answered. "And now, I must have you submit to my prescription, and follow my advice. You must sit down quietly here, with your back to the light, and take a cup of very strong tea, which I will give you."

"I generally find coffee relieve headache, when I chance to have one," said Fermor.

"That is quite a mistake, I assure you," returned Miss White. "I have often heard papa insist on trying coffee; and many people maintain that it is the best cure; but there is nothing like tea, very hot, and very strong."

"Why not listen to excellent counsel—advice gratis?" said Kate. "Unless, indeed, the iron obduracy hold against friendly interest in his health, as well as against most other pleasant things."

Fermor silently took the offered seat, by Miss White. She was in the habit of presiding over the tea-equipage at one end of the breakfast-table; while Kate Ireton poured out the coffee at the other.

As Fermor took the smilingly-presented cup from Miss White's hand, Cecil said:—"And now give me a cup of your exquisite fragrant-steaming beverage, Kate. Coffee, to my taste, as far surpasses tea, as glorious rubious Burgundy transcends

your cold, pale, starveling Rhenish. Only a German can find anything to laud in his sickly, yellow Rhine-wines, in comparison with the generous 'warm south;' as only a Chinese Hong merchant can uphold Souchong, or Bohea, against Mocha and Berbice. Save at Heathcote, I have never tasted in England my favourite berry-scented drink as it should be. On the continent, you get coffee; in our dear island, you get embrowned water, or mud composed of grounds. Your coffee, Kate, might be sipped, with closed eyes, and make us fancy ourselves at Florence again."

"And with this blessing," said the 'Squire; "that you wouldn't have to open them to brush off a myriad of gnats and mosquitoes, that come buzzing and worrying around you."

"There is this of good in the little torments you mention, uncle," said Kate; "they give you warning, by their fairy trumpet, when they are about to commence their attack."

"Yes, plague take 'em, they do!" said the 'Squire. "Many a time, my night's rest has been broken, by their shrill pipe close to my ear, sounding its ill-omened song."

"A stirring réveillé, that's all, uncle!"

"An evil threat, infallibly fulfilled," he answered. "Kate, Kate! your partiality for Italy will make you even defend its pest of stinging insects."

She laughed, and replied: "Well, I give up the gnats! Happy the cause that has only one drawback to be admitted!"

"What have you to say on behalf of the earthquakes, Kate?" said Fermor. "Can you plead anything in their favour?"

"They're formidable stumbling-blocks, I own," she answered. "I tremble at the thoughts of setting up any safe or steadfast defence for them. I'm afraid there's nothing stable to be advanced on their ground. I yield before the earthquakes—for all my relationship to a certain substance renowned for fortitude and firmness."

"And now, having swallowed my draught like an obedient patient, Miss White, permit the good boy his customary lump of sugar, with a little cream and coffee upon it," said Fermor as he moved up to Kate's end of the table.

"Is the headache better?" she said, as she filled up the cup he held towards her.

"It was never bad. I did not sleep well, which may have occasioned the ill-looks that Miss White was so kind as to interpret into illness for me."

"But you were paler than usual: she was right there," said Kate.

"Did you notice how I—did you see me? I thought you were looking another way when I came in; that you were attending to your uncle, Kate," he said, with more of hurry in his voice than it usually had.

"Yes, I was," she answered; "but don't you know that women have the faculty of looking one way and seeing another? They're like flies, with eyes, or sight, all round their head. There's your doctress, now, for instance, with her eyes fixed upon the urn before her; but she's looking sharp out to see that you don't transgress orders. You're under regimen, you know; don't exceed bounds. Go back to your place, where you can be within proper medical care."

"But I don't own myself ill," said Fermor.

"Sick people are always unruly, and unwilling to do what they're ordered," she returned.

"Do you assume the responsibility of ordering me, and ensuring my cure?" he said.

"Not I; I know too well the odium that attaches to interfering with another person's professional case," said Kate. "Return to your original physician, as in duty bound."

"Mr. Worthington, when the breakfast-cloth is removed, I want you to lift me down that fine book of engravings—the views of our British Cathedrals," said Miss White. "It is in the next room only; shall we all adjourn there?"

They went into the oak parlour. Miss White, by question, comment, appeal, manœuvre, contriving to keep Fermor in attendance upon her and the book of prints: until he resolutely broke away, and joined Kate and Cecil, who were at another table; she copying music, and he speaking of the time they heard it together abroad.

"Kate, shall I read you the new poem I told you was just come out?" said Fermor. "I see it is among the last book-parcel from town."

"No; don't let us take you away from what you are about," she replied.

"I am about nothing; I am an idle man; I want you to give me employment," he replied.

"Your late employer is wondering why you quit her service; she has not done with you yet. Go; Alicia will find you occupation. I've none for you," said Kate.

"Let me read aloud; you said, the other day, you could copy music and listen at the same time."

"But don't you see I'm listening already to talk? and good talk is worth good reading, any time. Books are excellent companionship, but conversation is even more sociable than books."

"Then let me partake of what I will allow to be yet pleasanter than what I proposed," he said, drawing a chair near her. "What was your subject?"

"This glorious composition; it is full of fire, and vigour, and dramatic effect. You should have heard La Rosa in it, as we have; and seen her play it too; her acting is as great as her singing—and that is saying much," said Cecil.

"It is a great performance," returned Fermor. "She played the part here in England last season, and I made a point of going each night she played while I was in London."

"Were you in London this winter? Then you could leave your—leave home—though not come abroad," said Kate, quickly.

"We went to town for a short period together. I was anxious to have the best medical advice upon the case that could be procured; and my father consented to oblige me by going up to London, and consulting several of our most eminent physicians. The opera was among the few amusements he cared for, and we frequently went."

"My dear 'Squire," said Alicia White, "the morning is sunny, and beautifully warm; a little gentle turn in the rose

walk will do you good. You shall lean upon my arm. Let me have the pleasure of attending you. And here is your cane; and here is your garden-hat."

"La Rosa herself couldn't act the part of a perfectly charming young lady to greater perfection!" smiled Cecil Lascelles, as Miss White led away the 'Squire, with a great parade and display of sweet behaviour, and pretty attentions, and becoming ministry to age. "Played to a nicety! No one can say the lovely Alicia is not an accomplished actress, although she is lost to the stage and the public at large! 'Tis a thousand pities so much talent should be confined to so limited a sphere. However, she herself is evidently too modest to think so; and is as lavish of her art-powers in her own private circle of friends as she could be, were a theatre her field of action."

"We treat her with scarcely more respect than it is the custom to observe in discussing the merits of a public favourite. Her back is scarcely turned, ere we make her our theme," said Fermor Worthington, with his grave smile.

"I ought to apologize for treating a friend of yours with so little ceremony," said Cecil, frankly, to Fermor and Kate. "I forgot that she was related to you both; and indeed, her being a guest here ought alone to have secured her from my freedom of remark. But I don't know how it is—those sugar words, that honey look, and that soft creep-mouse manner of hers, disturb me beyond any tartness and bluntness I ever encountered. There's something perfectly exasperating to my peculiar nature about such uniform sweetness. But, forgive me; I'm transgressing again;" and he laughed at his own vehemence.

"You ought to direct your apology chiefly to her kinsman," said Kate. "His was the rebuke. No wonder; she's a young lady after his own heart. Such a pattern of perfection as Alicia White—so perfect in propriety, so perfect in amiability, so perfect in lady-like or ladyish conduct, so completely the model of what the Iron Cousin would have a woman to be—she must be quite to his taste."

"She is neither to my taste, nor is she by any means what I would have a woman to be," said Fermor.

Kate's brightest and most beaming look flashed across her face; but she kept it stedfastly bent over what she was about.

"No! What fault can you possibly have to find with her?" exclaimed Cecil.

"Nay; I have no better reason for my want of taste," said Fermor, with his peculiar grave smile lurking in his eyes, "than that she is neither more nor less than Miss White of Egg—ham."

Again the bright flash crossed Kate's cheek and brow; but still she neither moved nor spoke.

"By no means what you would have a woman to be!" pursued Cecil, reverting to Fermor's words; "why, what would you have in a woman, if it be not the qualities that characterizes the fair Alicia? I thought it was only my own luckless, truant disposition, that found anything to dislike in such feminine perfection. I thought you, like most men, admired sweetness and gentleness, and mild consideration, and a soft voice, and an assenting speech, with sympathy and interest in look, manner, and tone?"

"I do," said Fermor, composedly, though increasing in fervour as he went on. "But insipidity is not sweetness; silliness is not gentleness; indifference is not consideration; a silky murmur is not a soft voice; a perpetual agreeing is not assent; a vacant, meaningless, vapid languish is not warmth of interest or sympathy. Alicia White is an incontestably faultless young lady, but she does not fulfil my idea of that glorious and, perhaps, most perfect of God's creatures—a womanly woman."

There was a pause; the pause that frequently ensues in conversation, where one of the talkers has spoken in the unmistakeable tone of deep and powerful feeling—more especially when he chances to be of grave temperament, and habitually calm manners.

"Come, let us have a particular description of your beautiful of womanhood," said Cecil, at last, lightly, in reply.

"Excuse me; I hold it too sacred a theme to be approached with a mocking lip," said Fermor, in a manner which he made as correspondingly playful with Cecil's as might be.

"If the Iron Cousin speaks, no fear but the lip shall be sombre enough, in all conscience," said Kate. "Pray let us have his sombre, sober sentiments upon what a woman should be. He'll supply what he deems the proper degree of reverential gravity, while we'll engage to receive it with due mirth."

"Scoffers are not fit audience for a devotee proclaiming his solemn faith," answered Fermor.

"Solemn, indeed!" laughed she.

When the 'Squire returned from his garden walk, Kate observed that he looked heated and fatigued. She left her copying, and went towards him, insisting that he should lounge in his arm-chair, and rest; adding, that if a little nap crept over him, he was not to be unkind and repulse it, and pretend that he didn't want it, and bid it keep its distance, under a notion of being very virtuous and nonsomnolent. She ordered it so that the conversation should continue, yet in such a tone as might not interrupt the sleeper. Her own subdued voice set the example to the others; and this quiet, equable murmur had, as she intended, rather the effect of lulling than of disturbing him.

He was much refreshed when he woke up, and chatted away with all his usual cheerfulness and good-humoured heartiness.

"You have often bid me choose some ornament as a keepsake, uncle mine," she said, playfully, as she leaned over him, and fondled his grey hair, admiring its thickness, and softness, and silvery sheen, as the light fell upon it from the nearest window. "You shall give me some of these looks for a bracelet."

"Some of my hair, child! why, I'm as grey as a badger! There might have been a time when Harry Heathcote's brown locks were worthy to figure on the arm of a fair damsel who should have done him the honour to wear them; but now, what should you do with a bracelet of this grizzled, frosty stuff?"

"Frosted silver, uncle; I like it, that's enough."

"Pooh, pooh, you jade! you're joking?"

"I'm so far from joking, that you shall find me in very serious, angry earnest, if you persist in refusing me. You have over and over pressed me to have a parcel of trinkets I don't care a straw for; and now I've found out something I should really prize, you won't let me have it."

"Give me a kiss, you baggage! and have it as you will."

"The old termination to all our differences, uncle! You'd far better begin there, knowing you will always have to end there. It would save us both a vast deal of trouble, and you'd get your payment in advance,—a kiss at first, instead of at last. Cash on demand; ready-money business; a prompt caress, instead of booking it against me, and being brought to book yourself. It would be but asking and having then, for you as well as me."

"And what shall the clasp be?" said Cecil. "How say you to rubies, 'Squire? Would they not contrast well, both with the hair of the bracelet, and the arm it is to embellish; or pearls, for harmony's sake?"

"No, no; nothing so showy as the one, or so washy as the other," said Kate.

"Diamonds would shame the homeliness of the rest, I suppose," said the 'Squire.

"Certainly, uncle; the glitter of brilliants would ill assort with the home thoughts and home happiness that will be woven into my bracelet."

"Why not let the clasp be of plain gold?" said Fermor; "what could so well typify the donor's solid sterling qualities?"

"I am already represented in my grey locks," said the 'Squire.

"I'll tell you what, uncle, I think I'll have an iron clasp. It will make a good guard. It will be strong, stern, grim, unrelenting; no fear of the fastening giving way and coming loose; it will be odd, uncouth, ugly; no fear of any one being tempted to steal my bracelet. Yes, I'll decide upon having an iron clasp to it. I think I have seen such curiously wrought; I'll spare no pains to get one, or to have one made for me."

"I think it would look very well; it will be in good keeping with the iron-grey hair," laughed the 'Squire.

"And form a rich dark relief against the lily whiteness it is to set off," said Cecil.

"I rather think it is adopted with an eye to some such effect, is it not, Kate?" Fermor said. "Its grave sobriety is intended as a heightener to the silver hair and the snowy skin, serving to enhance their pure simplicity of beauty, by its own admitted lack of attraction."

"Ay, it is chosen as a foil: a staid, dull, lustreless, unsightly, but useful and worthy object, well fitted for its purpose of keeping all firm and fast. Virtue, and morality, and propriety, and decorum, and stern duty, and all the cold, uncomfortable, hard, austere goodnesses, are embodied in an iron clasp. Iron it shall be."

As Kate concluded, she cast one glance at Fermor. He had moved away, and was looking down in silence, with his lips set firm, as he drew a book of prints towards him, and began to turn over the leaves.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

A MORNING or two after this, Kate came flying into the room where her uncle sat with Fermor Worthington, who was reading the newspaper to him.

Fermor had been staying the last few days at the Hall; and talked of returning home that afternoon.

"Now, uncle, listen to me," she said, eagerly. "First, there's your kiss for having granted my request; and secondly, I'll tell you what the request is."

"Well, what now, hussy?"

"Uncle, Matty tells me Ben is in disgrace. That he has been guilty of some neglect or forgetfulness; that he omitted to obey some order you gave about Chesnut Phillis's mash. Is it so?"

"Yes; that lad is very careless of late. I don't know what's come to him," said the Squire, with a displeased look clouding

his face. "He used to be the most punctual, orderly young fellow that one could wish to have about the horses. But he has for some time past been so dull, and stupid, and forgetful, that I've determined to read him a lesson. I was obliged to speak very sharply to him this morning when I visited the stable, and threatened that the next time I heard complaints of him, he should go."

"Go! what, Ben Dimble! the boy who used to lead Shetland Bobby—your Kate's little pony, uncle?"

"If he don't behave better—if he's guilty of any more such blunders—yes," said the 'Squire, stoutly.

"The lad's very unhappy, uncle; Matty tells me he's fit to hang himself, to think he's offended you. Your angry words, and threat of dismissal, have almost broken his heart. I want to take him some kind message from you; to tell him you've forgiven him, and will overlook his remissness this time, on condition of better care in future. Let me take the poor lad some comfort, uncle."

"No, no; he don't deserve it. Let him smart a little. It will do him good," said the 'Squire.

"Uncle, look at me," said Kate.

She took his face between both her hands, and held it close to hers, while she gazed straight into his eyes, and then gave him three or four hearty kisses.

"You monkey! how dare you get the better of me thus?" smiled the 'Squire.

"Because it is the better, uncle. Good for you, better for me, best for poor Ben."

And away she flew, laughing, on her errand of grace.

"The lad hardly deserves to be let off so easily, though," said the 'Squire, the shade of displeasure crossing his face again as he thought of Ben's delinquency; "he ought by rights to have been left to feel the sting of my just reprimand for a few hours longer. It would have taught him that I don't choose to be trifled with."

"Then why did you yield to Kate's pleading?" said Fermor
'It was a piece of kind-hearted sympathy on her part, no doubt

but if you felt that it was undeserved,—you who know the merits of the case while she could not judge them correctly—why did you not withstand her entreaties? Besides, forgive me, my dear old friend, but indeed you do wrong to give way so entirely and uniformly to Kate's wishes, whatever they may be. It feeds her wilfulness, her love of power. It makes her arbitrary, exacting. It fosters the single point of imperfection in her character. You should know when to deny her, for her own sake; and from the depth of my soul I affirm, I speak but for her sake."

"Ah, my dear fellow, it's easy for you to say this——"

"Easy!" was echoed within Fermor Worthington's heart; though by no uttered word did he interrupt the 'Squire.

"But you'd find it as difficult as I do to resist her, were she to plead to you as she does to me."

"Difficult, but not impossible," was Fermor's reply.

"Nay, impossible," returned the 'Squire, "as you'd allow were you tried as I am. Were you to feel those soft bright curls drooping over your face—to see those clear eyes looking into yours—to have that fresh rosy mouth within an inch of your own, pouring out its gentle yet earnest, playful yet pressing entreaties, you'd own, as I do, that there's no answering her in any other way than as she wishes."

Fermor drew a deep inward breath; and then he said, in a low voice: "I should find strength, courage, by thinking of *herself*, instead of her beauty."

"Ay, but her beauty is so much part of herself, that I can't separate them, for the life of me," said the 'Squire. "You, my dear fellow, are, as she truly calls you, the Iron Cousin, and have all the requisite firmness, and self-command, and rectitude of judgment to distinguish accurately, and to act consistently; but I, alas! can only love her, and therefore indulge her."

"Love her and therefore restrain her, in all tenderness, in all affection, you should say, dear 'Squire," said Fermor.

"I might say it, but I fear I should not do it," laughed the Squire.

Miss White now came in, proposing to take the 'Squire a turn

in the garden, as the sun shone full and warm upon the rose-walk she said. But just as she had brought him his stick, his gloves, his hat, and all the other etceteras she judged fit to equip him with, Kate returned; and finding her uncle about to repeat the expedition which she thought had before over-fatigued him taken just at noontide, interfered with the arrangement very peremptorily; and, in her eagerness, used some not particularly ceremonious or polite expressions to Alicia White for proposing it.

"As you please, Kate, dear," replied she, with an air of meekness and injured innocence; "but the dear 'Squire will bear me witness that he said he enjoyed his walk the other day, or I should not have thought of asking him to repeat it. I imagined you were engaged, too; that you wanted to stay and hear Mr. Worthington read, and would be glad of some one to attend your uncle in your stead."

"I can fancy nothing that could make me glad to be away from uncle, or pleased to see any one else supply my place near him," said Kate, haughtily.

"No need to put yourself in a pet, Kate, dear, or to speak with such a princess air," returned Miss White. "Poor little I only wished to offer my services, in case they could be made useful or agreeable."

"When they are either—to me, I'll ask you for them," replied she.

"Kate!" exclaimed Fermor, in a voice that made her start.

"A spark of anger from your eyes!" she said.

"Struck out of them by your hard, improper speech, Kate," he returned.

"By my flint against your iron, good cousin!" she replied, with a laugh.

"Oh, pray don't let me be the cause of getting poor, dear Kate into disgrace!" said Miss White. "I can quite forgive her any little fit of temper. She don't mean it; it's only her way. To give her time to recover, I'll go and take a turn in the garden by myself."

A silence followed Miss White's departure. At length the

Squire said : " My Kate, what made you so bluff to poor Miss White ? What had she done to affront you ? "

" She did not affront me—she never means to affront any one, she's only too civil, too fearful of giving offence. It is that which provokes me in her."

" But you really should not let your feeling provoked make you behave uncourteously, my dear. Remember you are in your own house, my Kate, and should never forget what is due to a guest."

" Anywhere—to any one—Kate should forbear from other behaviour than becomes her as a lady—as a woman," Fermor said in a quiet tone.

" Then, you mean to say my treatment of Miss White was unbecoming either lady or woman ? But no wonder you reprove any one who dares to speak less than obsequiously to Alicia White."

" I am not thinking of Alicia White ; I am thinking of you, Kate," said Fermor, gravely.

" And what of me, pray ? Say out your thought, by all means."

" That, for Kate's own sake, I would beseech her to set a guard upon her freedom of tongue ; to bear in mind how ill it befits one like herself to be thus ungracious ; to reflect, in time, that a woman who speaks thus trenchantly, thus intemperately—who can be so rude, so imperious, so careless of wounding the feelings of those with whom she is in constant intercourse—weakens the regard of her friends, and instead of their feeling it a privilege to know her, she becomes not pleasant to live with."

" And what is the saying such harsh things as these but rude ? " she returned.

" Not rude ; candid."

" Hair-splitting ! "

" Not so ; I can clearly define the line between rudeness and candour. The former is merely a vent to spleen—an entirely selfish feeling—a total disregard of those of others, in the relief to our own ; but candour has for the aim of its frank speeches the welfare and amelioration of those with whom it deals."

“ Preaching ! ”

There was a pause.

“ I cannot bear to see my Kate vexed ; I cannot have her roughly chidden,” said the 'Squire.

“ I have hardly the right ; I own I seem, even to myself, scarcely warranted in taking this tone of admonishment ; but on the strength of our relationship, and, still more, out of the sincerity and warmth of my esteem for Kate's finer qualities, together with my conviction that the force of her character is such, that it could effect its own cure of its single defect, if it chose seriously to undertake the task, I venture to speak out thus plainly.”

“ And why should she undertake anything half so troublesome ? ” said the 'Squire ; “ when she's very delightful as she is, notwithstanding her one defect, as you call it. In spite of Kate's occasional freaks of wilfulness—like my chestnut mare—she's thorough bred.”

“ It is because she is thorough bred—a noble creature—that we would fain see her without a single blemish,” returned Fermor.

“ You want perfection !—which is rarely seen in man or horse, still less in woman or mare,” laughed the 'Squire.

“ The rarer, the more precious—when it is attained,” said Fermor.

“ And Kate could attain this perfection, you mean to say ? ” pursued the 'Squire.

“ I do. Kate might be anything she wishes to be.”

“ He says I have force of character sufficient to achieve great things, you hear, uncle ; but it is clear he believes it to be a Herculean task of remove, from my present state, to perfection,” said Kate. “ He thinks me far enough from it now.”

There was no reply ; and Kate sat with a swelling heart, and a choking sensation in her throat, that in most women would have brought tears.

“ You are too hard upon my little girl,” said the 'Squire, reproachfully, to Fermor. “ Come hither, Kate ! ”

She went and leaned over his chair, while the old man drew her cheek against his.

"Do not ask him to be gentler to me and my faults than his conscience will let him," said Kate. "The Iron Cousin sacrificing truth to flattery, would be worse than all. It would be unjust to himself—hateful to me!"

"The respect he feels for her higher and better nature, will not suffer him to be false and uncandid towards its less worthy points," replied Fermor. "It is the very strength and depth of his admiration for her excellences which will not now let him be blind or silent to her faults, and which will most assuredly prevent his ever flattering them."

"Why, Kate!" said Cecil Lascelles, as he entered the room at this moment, "what has detained you so long? I have been expecting you to come and walk in the shrubberies for the last hour. Did you not say you would join me there, when I asked you to come and see how well the young bay-trees are thriving in their new place?"

"Yes; I had forgotten—I—I could not come; I could not let uncle walk in the heat; it did not agree with him the last time he went out in the middle of the day. But he is getting the better of his rheumatism; and, I trust, very shortly, he will be able to resume his rides, and walks with us all, as usual."

"Will you try over this duet, Kate? I think the 'Squire will like to hear us sing it," said Cecil, going to the piano-forte, and placing the piece he spoke of upon the desk.

"With pleasure," she said. "Few things could have offered more opportunely, more welcomely, just now. Nothing serves so well to take the bitter flavour out of one's spirits, after a dose of moral physic, as sweet music."

They went on as usual, with piece after piece, until Alicia White came in, and challenged the 'Squire to give her a promised lesson in chess; and, after a time, Kate heard the voice of Fermor Worthington taking leave of her uncle, and saying that he meant to walk home instead of riding, as he felt inclined for a quiet stroll through the woods on foot, in preference to the dusty lanes on horseback. Then came a few more words of farewell to

Miss White, and then his step crossed the room in her own direction.

He shook hands with Cecil, and, a moment after, Kate found her own within his.

"Good bye, Kate!"

"Good bye!" she said, at the end of her breath, while her heart stood still, as with a sullen weight, which she took to be indignation, resentment, anger.

"Mr. Lascelles, pray come here and settle this knotty point for us," said Alicia White, from the chess-table. "This dear, modest 'Squire, will not allow that he can decide it; he wishes the question to be referred to you, as his master, and highest authority."

While Cecil obeyed, Fermor Worthington drew the hand he still held within his arm, and said: "Kate, you will not refuse to accompany me as far as the lawn?"

For an instant she drew back; the next she replied, with a forced air: "If you wish it, of course."

They passed in silence through the glass-door, into the flower-garden; the rose-walk, as it was called, running close to that side of the old house, and ending in the shrubberies which led on to the open space or lawn forming the boundary of the home-grounds where they joined the park-woods.

The short distance they walked together without speaking, Kate Ireton employed in summoning all the spirit of opposition and resistance, and reckless daring, within her; in stifling rebellious emotion, in whispering to herself the causes she believed she had to feel offended; in preparing to meet what she thought his cold, stoical composure, with coolness and indifference; in fortifying herself against what she had sometimes found rise traitorously within her, in favour of one who evidently saw her errors too distinctly to entertain aught but a low opinion of a wayward, petulant, spoiled girl, that was to be kindly guided and won into better behaviour. The more she found herself inwardly admitting arguments and thoughts on his side, the more vehemently did she resist their impression. That tone of right which he al-

ways took with her—while secretly owning its justice, made her only the more sturdily resist its influence. It gave him that air of superiority to which she was unaccustomed from any one but himself; and which superiority, the more she internally felt and acknowledged, the less she was willing outwardly to succumb to, or own to. It was this which so frequently gave to her manner the contradictiousness, and even averseness, towards himself, which peculiarly hurt Fermor. He, who could have no idea of the source of her being more perverse to him than to any one else only saw and felt the wounding result.

During the little space of time it took to reach the garden, where Kate had been hurriedly giving way to pride and heated feeling, Fermor had been collecting patience and forbearance, and temperate firmness, with resolution to make one last attempt to arouse her better self.

“Kate,” he said, “let me take with me the belief that you will perform what is due to your own truth and uprightness of character. You will promise me to make honourable atonement to Miss White for your discourtesy of to-day?”

“Why should I promise to offer an apology where I cannot feel that any is needed? I shall not promise, since that will be to own I am to blame—which I do not perceive.”

“Then promise nothing, but act rightly.”

“I will not be thus dictated to. I am no longer a child.”

“But a grown woman; and, therefore——”

“And, therefore, by no means, of course, a reasonable being. You ought to know—since such is the received opinion—it does not follow that, because a woman attains unto the age of reason, she necessarily becomes either a reasonable creature, or willing to listen to reason.”

“You will not plead such foolish fallacies in your case, surely, Kate. You know better; you know that you are neither wanting in sense nor sense of right. Come, you intend—you will make this apology, will you not?”

She felt herself giving way at his change of voice, as it dropped into his earnest depth of tone, and, therefore, nerved herself

to say : " I am aware of no such intention. Besides, I know not by what right you insist thus upon forcing me into doing that which I've no mind to."

" Have I not the right to entreat you to be true to yourself? Does not my privilege of relationship alone warrant my freedom of speech? Have not you yourself, Kate, owned the claim of cousinhood between us, as a title to speak our minds openly and without reserve to each other?"

" A right so urged, so enforced, becomes a tyranny," she exclaimed impetuously.

" Kate!"

She would not see the look that accompanied this single word; she would not suffer herself to listen to the tone of appeal in which it was uttered. With a passionate longing in her heart to speak the words which should ask pardon for her perverseness towards himself, and confess the yearning she had to act generously and rightly by another as he suggested, and to give free way to all her better emotions, she yet yielded to the idea uppermost in her mind—an impression of his merely desiring to carry his point, to influence her actions; and to prove his power, irrespective of any feeling which should warrant that one which she vaguely began to recognize within herself. It was in a sort of desperation and terror at this half-discerned self-surprisal, that she forced herself to add :—" I acknowledge no authority but uncle's; his claim alone I admit to guide my conduct, to sway my actions. All other rights and claims I look upon as impertinence, and—I repeat—a would-be tyranny."

" Do not fear; neither impertinence nor tyranny shall you know from me, Kate."

" And as yonder is the lawn, perhaps the Iron Cousin will consider I have complied with his wish of accompanying him through the grounds far enough. Whereupon, I will bid him good evening, and return to the house;" and with a slight curtsey, she turned on her heel, as if afraid of her own resolution, walking back at a rapid pace, and shutting her ears to the "Farewell, Kate!" which sounded with something of mournful reproach and recall.

CHAPTER XXXIV

FERMOR WORTHINGTON continued to pace up and down the thickly-screened shrubbery-walk, after Kate Ireton left him.

"Why endeavour to recall her?" he thought. "To what end seek to bring her back, or detain her with me? What should I say, that could avail, after that bitter, bitter word of hers? 'Tyranny!' Does she indeed feel my remonstrances oppressive—a burden—a tyranny? When, if I know my own heart, they spring from the very tenderness of my regard for her excellence, from my desire to see it perfect, consummate, worthy that supremacy of beauty which is hers; that graciousness and goodness of aspect which bespeak a nature capable of all virtue, all noble feeling. Yet, tyranny! Tyranny!"

The word seemed to haunt him in its cruellest force of meaning, as indicating her impression of his conduct towards her. The playful temper in which she had hitherto borne his most candid speeches, and strongest remonstrances, even when she had most spiritedly retorted upon them, showed that she had never really resented them. But now, to treat them as tyranny, as severity, as an unwelcome strain of authority on his part, cut him to the quick. Her sharpest and most petulant behaviour came upon him just then with new force, with a painful and most repulsive effect. He involuntarily recollected the words his father had once used, in speaking of her,—that hereafter, her want of gentleness and deference would be felt to be an unloveable, unfeminine characteristic,—a moral defect, for which no beauty of face or intellect could compensate. He tried to palliate the remembrance of her acrimony, by a recollection of its being chiefly manner; and by recalling instances in which he had found her better than her words,—possessed of more generosity, more sentiment, than they seemed to denote; and how often, while her outward demeanour was wayward and perverse, she had in fact

been full of right feeling. But then recurred the impression of that demeanour in its most ungracious, most unwinning aspect how disregardful, how ungentle, it too frequently made her appear. Instances of its startling abrupt turns; of its captiousness, its imperiousness, its wilful pertinacity, its apparent carelessness of wounding, presented themselves unbidden, with overwhelming effect; and never had they struck him as so intolerable. Till now, he was at liberty openly to animadvert upon them, to express his little liking for them, to meet them with freedom of expostulation. But now, that he was unexpectedly forbidden from either playfully admonishing them, or earnestly appealing against them, and in his unwilling self-avowal that they were distasteful to him, they became suddenly magnified and multiplied into unbearable bulk and amount. So long as they might be parried by retort, and opposed by candour of their own kind, they had seemed but sportive humours, light, inconsequent caprices, that would mellow into gentler sprightliness, as her better sense had time to assert its sway, and permitted her to yield to its influence. But now that such candour was prohibited, now that entire frankness was to be banished from between them, and resented as a tyrannical exercise of the power which his position with her gave him, he felt there was an end to the hope he had always unconsciously cherished, that he should eventually succeed in winning her to an outward gentleness more in consonance with that which he believed to be her real disposition. With inexpressible bitterness of soul, he owned to himself, that if compelled to relinquish this hope, the chief charm of Kate's character would be lost. Were he once convinced that she indeed wanted that tenderness of feeling which he had ever believed she possessed, in spite of her exterior captiousness and unmindfulness, his whole delight in her would be poisoned. Then the blunt speech, the lively rejoinder, the sarcastic, taunting repartee, instead of seeming but marks of a youthful animation and heart-ease, which as yet had never known reverse, would assume the serious colour of hardness, indifference, heartlessness. The pang with which Fermor Worthington asked himself whether

these were in reality the source of Kate Ireton's conduct to him, opened his eyes to the extent of his regard to her, and to the true nature of that regard.

He covered his face with his hands, and, in anguish of heart, asked himself whether, with such a doubt of her genuine character, he really did and could love her. Whether he could wish a woman of such blunt manners, and ungracious speech and demeanour, to become his wife. And then, innumerable instances of her peculiar perverseness and roughness of retort towards himself, pressed upon his remembrance; and he vainly tried to recall one in which she had shown distinctive partiality or liking, still less preference or tenderness. His very anxiety of desire to find such, made him exaggerate, distort, and misconstrue their unpropitious meaning; his very thirst to recollect anything that could be interpreted into loving regard, misled him as to their significance. So far from being able to discover one trace of what he sought, all seemed to indicate even less inclination, less kindness, less affection, than she had shown towards others.

And then arose within him the strong, invincible feeling, that unless he could have Kate's love in pure, undoubted, perfect gift, as he himself could have given her his, no weaker liking would content him. Could he have hoped to inspire her with any such passionate regard as the one he now felt within his own heart towards her, he might have yielded himself up to the full torrent of its empire, and besought her to accept his faith, his trust, his exclusive reliance upon her to become all she could become, and all he believed she would become, when love should prompt her nature to be true to its own beautiful best self.

But since no such hope existed, he felt even proudly thankful to believe himself yet capable of struggling against his own passion. He tried to rejoice that he had discovered it in time to prevent its acquiring irresistible force; in time to preserve himself from wreck of peace, of courage, and of endeavour to effect his own cure. He sternly determined on the spot, to subject himself to the ordeal of absence, as the only means of effectual self-redemption from the torture, the abject moral condition, the wasted ener-

gies, the lost life, consequent upon yielding to a hopeless passion. Love, gentlest regard and affection, ineffable tenderness, he knew he must always feel for Kate Ireton. But the miseries of unavailing desire to see her his, he resolved to spare himself, by at once quenching such thoughts from out his heart.

When Fermor Worthington came to such conclusions as these within himself, he did not fail to act up to their spirit, firmly, unflinchingly, with honest effort, and truth of intention.

He had just closed his mental conflict, and succeeded in assuming the outward calm which decision upon a future course usually brings, when the light, rapid step of Cecil Lascelles sounded near, and in another moment he entered the shrubby-path, where Fermor had been pacing to and fro.

"Still lingering in this pleasant spot!" he said, as he approached. "I don't wonder at that. It is just the place for an afternoon saunter. I slipped away from the oak-parlour, to enjoy one myself. I left that cloying sweetmeat, Miss White, to play out her game of 'pretty' with the good 'Squire. Upon my life, Fermor, that girl's worse than a whole dinner of Guava jelly, with strawberry-jam for breakfast, tea and supper. She's an insufferable, suffocating spoonful of treacle, administered day after day, and hour after hour. She looks like a walking sugar-loaf, with its silly, small, white head, perking out from the blue paper cover."

"Did you meet ——" Fermor had thought himself strong, but the first utterance of her name was, for the moment, too much for him.

"Kate, you mean? I came out with the express hope of finding her still in the garden. But I missed her somehow. Perhaps it is all for the best," said Cecil, with a sudden alteration of voice, which he tried to carry off with a constrained laugh. "Had I found her here, I might not have been able to maintain my—to keep my resolution not to speak to her till—Worthington," he broke out, in yet another tone, "I must relieve my heart by pouring it out to you. You are her nearest relation, after her uncle, and who so fit to be frankly spoken to? I'm glad I found you here, I'm glad you were not gone. I want to have your good wishes."

Fermor tried to speak, but found no words ; he felt what was coming. He turned, and plucked a sprig of bay from one of the nearest trees.

"Your beautiful, glorious cousin,—admirable, charming, enchanting Kate! I love her, Worthington, beyond words to tell, yet it is a joy in itself to put the rapturous feeling into words—poor as they are to express it. And to such a good fellow as yourself, too, who have known her from a child, and know how dear, how delightful a creature she is, and therefore will bear my raptures patiently, and listen to my hopes kindly and encouragingly, and will not smile or marvel at the former, although you may deem the latter wild, rash, too far presuming upon the friendly favour, the sweet familiarity she has treated me with. Yet, ah, Worthington! could you have seen her as I have, gentle to me, when curt to others; could you have known what it is to perceive her agreeing with me when differing and dissenting from others; consenting to my wishes and proposals, while opposing those of Miss White, or even yourself, her cousin—her Iron Cousin, as she playfully styles you—you would hardly wonder that I have dared to believe this portended a feeling—a regard—a preference that I would give up half the years of my life to obtain. I have told myself over and over, that I have no right to hope such distinction—so proud and surpassing a happiness can be mine, as to have won such a woman as Kate Ireton to look upon me with liking. (By heaven, Worthington, I would rather have her bare liking, than any other woman's fondest love!) Still, had you beheld her as I did, the other night, looking with artless, innocent gaiety into my face, and laying her sweet hand upon mine in affectionate womanly appeal—though the action had a purity and grace of intimacy right modest and simple—you would understand that I could scarce refrain from indulging maddest hopes, and beseeching her at once to confirm them."

The bay-leaves were crushed within the palm of Fermor Worthington; but he bent his head as if to smell them, while he compelled himself to say, "You have said nothing of this, then, to her!"

“No word, as yet. I determined to wait until my prospects were decided, and I knew what position I had to offer her. I have written to urge my mother upon this point, and am now impatiently expecting the answer, which shall enable me to lay my heart open to Kate, and learn from her whether all has been vain chimeras, and daring, presumptuous folly. When I think of her, my own hopes seem little less than this; when I think of myself, of the love I bear her, of the fond worship, the adoring admiration I feel within my heart for her, I cannot help gathering courage. No deferred time, no length of absence would dismay me, if——” Cecil walked a step or two, in eager, rapid, thought. Then he said, “Worthington, if, as I sometimes believe, my future path lies at a distance, wherein I am to achieve the fortune and station which are to be Kate’s, if she accept my love, I shall not dare to ask her to share my fate at once, and quit the uncle-father who loves her so dearly, and to whom she is so tenderly attached. Neither should I think it right to subject her to the fatigues and anxieties of such a career as mine will probably be for the next few years. But if she will consent to listen to me—if I find that I have not been too sanguine in believing what my wishes prompt me to hope, I shall ask her to abide in England until I can return to her with such rank and wealth as may be won by straining every nerve, and devoting every power of mind and body, every thought, every energy, to that end. This interval she will pass in the home where she has always lived happily, indulged and cherished; and it will be my comfort to know that she is thus, with her two esteemed and beloved kinsmen to protect and guard her. You will say, I am indulging in strange blissful day-dreams, Worthington; but should the issue crown my hopes with their fulfilment, I shall confide her to your care and affection with the same happy faith and trust as if you were her brother. For all she torments and rallies you so unmercifully, Fermor, I am convinced she regards you no less warmly and honouringly than if you were in truth her brother. But I am wearying you with my lover’s talk; only your own patience would have borne with it so long. Any one’s stock of that commodity but the Iron Cousin’s would

have been exhausted ere this. You are pale, and look tired. Forgive me my egotistical discourse, though you will excuse it for the sake of her who has called it forth—for Kate's sake."

With all Fermor's self-command, he could not control the death-like hue that spread over his countenance, and blanched his very lips. It attracted, at length, even the notice of his unobservant companion, engrossed as he was with his subject, absorbed as he was in his own thoughts and hopes.

"You are ill, Worthington, or,—can it be, that,——" And Cecil suddenly stopped, as if struck motionless. Then he said, in his open, straightforward way, "Fermor, tell me, have you ever—have you any thoughts yourself, of Kate, as a wife?"

With the most perfect truth could he answer in the negative, which he did, in few words, low, but firm; quiet, but decisive. In one swift reflection-flash (though its spirit had actuated him throughout in listening to Cecil), he felt that he had himself renounced her as a lover; and in honour, in conscience, in the very depth and strength of his disinterested affection for her, he was bound to interfere no jot with that love which another man bore her so unmisgivingly, and so unreservedly.

Cecil Lascelles grasped his hand cordially, as he said, with a frank smile, "Nay, I know not what could possess me, to suppose it for an instant; I must have been a fool; but, you know, lovers are famed for folly, and imagine every one as far gone in their own peculiar infatuation as themselves. But are you really not feeling well, Worthington?"

"It is nothing—it will pass off; the air will do me good. I shall walk slowly on; and by the time I reach home, shall be quite myself."

And Fermor turned to cross the lawn, while Cecil went back to the Hall.

That night, after Dawson had undressed her young lady-mistress and retired, there came a knock at Alicia White's room door.

"Come in," said she.

Kate Ireton entered and walked straight towards her.

"Alicia, I am sorry for my rudeness to-day. Will you accept my apology?"

"La! Kate, dear! of course. I'm sure I quite pardoned you at the time. It's only our duty to forgive, you know. But what a strange girl you are, coming here in your long white dressing-gown, looking like a spectre, or as if you had seen one, your eyes are so unsettled, and your cheeks so flushed. What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing; I was restless; I shall be better now."

"What a curious creature you are, Kate, dear. I can't make you out; you're all crabbed and cross-grained with one, for no earthly reason, at one time; and at another, take it into your head to come and ask pardon like a good little girl. But it's very amiable and right-minded in you; and I'm sure I give you credit for your meekness, which is far more becoming and lady-like, depend upon it, than all the pettish airs you can put on."

"I never put on any airs, whether of pettishness or meekness; I give way to the one, because it is my way; and I came and offered an apology, because—because—I could not rest until I had done so."

"Only think of you, Kate, you, being anxious to make an apology! Why, I should as soon have dreamed of an empress desiring to apologize for sending somebody to Siberia. Well, you really are an odd girl!"

"I was anxious to make this apology, because I felt I should not sleep if I didn't, that's all. Thank you for telling me you accept it, Alicia. Good night."



CHAPTER XXXV.

ALTHOUGH Kate Ireton slept that night, it was the sort of sleep that brings little refreshment. Her eyes felt as if they had not closed; she dressed like one in a dream; and there was some

thing rankling at her heart which she thought wrath, yet which smote every now and then upon her with a sense of dread, of discouragement, of vague but deep fear.

She bravely strove against it, and kept it at bay ; but still it was there, close at hand, like some haunting shadow of impending evil.

She rallied all her spirit, and descended to the breakfast-room, looking only the more bright and animated, for the struggle within her, which brought a heightened colour to her cheek, a more lustrous sparkle to her eye.

With cheerful words to her uncle, a gay jest with Cecil, and a sprightly good morning to Alicia, she seated herself at the table, and began to pour out the 'Squire's coffee, to butter his dry toast, and place it ready at his elbow, for him to eat while he looked into the newspaper, which he generally did the first thing.

But the deep dull pain seized her again, as she caught sight of the letter-bag lying there. She knew her uncle often left the examination of his letters until he had finished his paper ; and now, he went on reading paragraph after paragraph, and commenting on the news to Cecil, who seemed himself pre-occupied and uneasy, as he cast occasional glances towards the post-bag, though apparently unwilling to express his eagerness and interrupt the 'Squire.

Kate's feet and hands became deadly cold, while her heart throbbed, and her temples burned. She saw as through a mist, and sat in a kind of impatient patience, while her uncle composedly scanned his paper from column to column, and skimmed and hummed the scraps of intelligence in a way that distracted her. Each time she dared to glance towards the letters that lay in the bag near him, she felt a sickening, feverish shiver creep over her. She wondered he could delay so long, yet dreaded the moment when he should touch them.

It came ; and as the 'Squire sorted them out, passing to each person theirs, she saw one directed to himself—as she had felt she should—in Fermor Worthington's hand-writing.

The blood flew to her heart, while a faint, ice-cold cloud came over her face. By a resolute effort, she held off the overpowering sensation, and recovered herself. Then she heard (with that curious power of hearing which gives to us the echo and meaning of words already uttered, but which, at the moment of their utterance fail to convey sound or sense to absence of mind) that her uncle had been saying, "Alicia, my dear, there's a dainty taper note for you; and Cecil, my boy, there's a thick packet for you—quite a volume; and here's——let me see—who can this be from? Not come by post, but by hand. Oh, 'your affectionate friend and kinsman, Fermor Worthington.' What can he have to write about, I wonder?"

Cecil Lascelles went over to the window-recess with his voluminous letter, in the contents of which he was soon buried; while Alicia exclaimed, "Mamma writes me word that my kind godmother, Lady Niggle, is going to spend the autumn at Baden-Baden, and has invited me to accompany her. Won't that be a delightful trip, Kate, dear?"

"Very," answered Kate, mechanically, with her eyes fixed upon her uncle's face.

"So, so! he's off suddenly; but he's perhaps right," said the 'Squire. "I hate farewells and leave-takings, they're only pain and discomfort; and he bade us good-bye yesterday. He writes word so, here, saying that he has for some time intended this journey, which is to see after some property of his father's on the continent; and that circumstances have determined him to go there without delay. He leaves Worthington Court this morning for London, on his way to Ostend, and so by the Rhine, to the south of Germany."

"That's charming!" cried Alicia White. "We may probably meet Mr. Worthington in the course of our travels. Kate, dear," she added, calling after Kate Ireton who was crossing the room with guardedly unwavering step, and making towards the door by strained control over nerve and limb, "if you are going to the housekeeper's room, will you send word to Dawson to pack up immediately? Mamma wishes me to return home

without delay. My dear 'Squire, I am shocked to run away so unceremoniously, but you see how the case stands, and I——"

The door closed behind Kate Ireton, in the midst of Miss White's speech. Once outside the room, Kate paused, and allowed herself to take breath. It came in gasps, in sobs, with shudders over all her frame, and sharp inward throes, that shook her from head to foot. After this one moment's pause, she endeavoured to walk stedfastly on; but the strong effort had been relaxed, the strict tension had been withdrawn—though for so short a space—and she felt that she should totter if she attempted to move. Nevertheless, she was desperately going to stumble onward, when she saw Matty come into the hall. She beckoned to her, caught her arm, and motioned to be led up stairs.

The nurse poured out question upon question as to what could ail her darling.

"Hush! Don't speak—don't talk to me! Get me to my own room," Kate contrived to say, in a voice that sounded to herself hoarse, and strange, and unlike her own.

"Set the window open—wide open; and go!"

"My darling Miss Kate, my——" began the bewildered Matty.

"Be still; be quiet! Go, once more! Go away!"

The nurse left her, but went no farther than the landing, where she stood close to the door, crying silently, and listening for any sound or token by which she could tell how her young mistress was.

Kate sat like a statue, and almost as pale; her eyes fixed on space, her hands firmly clenched, her teeth set fast. Suddenly, a hot rush of crimson darted over her white face, and she exclaimed, passionately: "It cannot be that I—it cannot, shall not be!" Then she got up, walked to the washing-stand, poured herself out a tumbler of water, and drank it at a draught; plunged her hands into a cold brimming basin, and plenteously laved her face and throat. Next, she went to the toilette-table, looked straight into the glass, and smoothed her hair with care and exactness; and, after that, she walked steadily to the door, and opened it to go down stairs.

"Why, Matty, what do you do here? I told you to leave me. Why are you still loitering near? I don't choose to be disobeyed. When I tell you to do a thing, I expect you to do it."

"My darling Miss Kate, you're not yourself this morning, or you could't speak so shortly to your poor old Mattykin."

"Matty, I won't be watched; when I say I want to be alone, I mean you to leave me to myself, and not to stay hanging about, noticing me, and attending to me, whether I will or no. Do you mind? I shall be really angry if this happen again."

"It sha'n't, my darling; it sha'n't, indeed," cried Matty.

On her return to the breakfast room, Kate was received by her uncle's exclamation: "Here is news, indeed, Kate! Cecil's letter summons him from us immediately. He is going back to India."

"To India!" she exclaimed. "But not immediately?" she said, going up to Cecil Lascelles, with tears springing in her eyes—tears which deeper emotion had not forced from her, but which the suddenness of the tidings, joined to her previous repressed excitement, called forth. "We are not to lose you directly? You are surely not obliged to quit England, at once?"

"I fear I must," said Cecil, looking deeply distressed, and in agitation which he scarcely attempted to conceal. "My mother's letter is urgent; the one she encloses from my uncle takes for granted that I will use no delay. I have sent down to the village to take my place by to-night's mail which passes through, for the north."

He spoke as if signing his own death-warrant—as if subscribing to a fatal necessity, from which he felt there was no escape.

"I have for some time foreseen this must come," he said, with as smiling an air as he could assume; "but I have a knack of putting off the pain of disagreeables until they actually arrive, and the pain must be borne. This, perhaps, increases its acuteness, but I am spared its lingering infliction. By never anticipating inevitable future miseries, I avoid their embittering present

pleasures, although I may be only adding venom to the sting when it comes. However, every one to his own peculiar philosophy, and deferring unhappiness to the last possible moment is mine. So, what say you, Kate, to a ride or a walk this fine morning?"

"If uncle be inclined, with all my heart," answered she; "though, I fear, he is hardly yet equal to going out, either on foot, or on horseback, for a day or two yet. What do you think, uncle? How do you feel? What says the rheumatism?"

"Why, really, for the sake of a gallop with Cecil for the last time, I think I must try my best," said the 'Squire. "I'll order the horses, and we can accompany Alicia a mile or two on her way. Her father has sent the carriage for her, and she is now gone to put on her bonnet and travelling gear."

She came in, soon after, all smiles and pretty speeches; full of lively regrets at leaving, and amiable acknowledgments of the agreeable time she had spent with the dear 'Squire, and dear Kate, at dear, delightful Heathcote Hall.

"And if I should meet Mr. Worthington abroad, Kate, dear, I'll be sure to give him your love, and tell him——"

"Do no such thing, if you please," said Kate, hotly; "I'll have no sweet messages taken to the Iron Cousin; who deserves none, for his abrupt departure from us."

"I'll tell him you're affronted with his unceremonious behaviour, then, shall I?"

"Tell him nothing from me. I'm quite equal to telling him my own bluntnesses," said Kate, with her short laugh.

"That you are, indeed, Kate, dear. Take my advice, and treat him a little better when he comes back. You really are too rough with him sometimes. Be advised by me, Kate, dear."

"I am not fond of being advised by any one," she answered. "I hate advice. It shows that those who give it think themselves wiser and better than the simpleton, or ill-behaved miss, they are favouring with their unasked remarks."

"Oh, I'm sure, Kate, dear, I could never dream for a mo-

ment of considering myself wiser and better than you—or than any one!” said Miss White. “I hope I know better what belongs to proper modesty and humility.”

“‘Than any one!’ You think it proper, then, to hold yourself less wise than a fool—less good than a thief or a murderer?” was the answer.

“Now, really, Kate, dear, if you’re going to turn upon me with any of your sharp repartees, I must run away; for my poor little head has no chance of finding a clever one in return.”

“Let me help you to make good your retreat, Miss White; suffer me to lead you to the carriage,” said Cecil Lascelles.

The ride was rather a sad one, in spite of the three friends endeavour to enjoy it cheerfully and pleasantly. They felt it was the last day of an intercourse and consociation which had been a very happy one to them all.

The good Squire tried to speak encouragingly and hopefully of the new life Cecil was about to commence. He, in his turn, endeavoured to express the same trust and energetic expectancy in looking forward to its active duties; declaring that he had long felt he ought to have a profession to follow, and was well contented one should be at length appointed for him, in which he might work, and win his way to honourable distinction. He smilingly owned that his natural disposition to make the most of the present, instead of considering how to make the most and the best of the future, would probably have kept him still an idle do-nothing, had he not been thus forced into more befitting exertion; and that, therefore, he ought to rejoice instead of repine, at the opening now afforded. And then Cecil sighed, and seemed about to add something more; but, true to his instinct of avoiding unwelcome subjects, he turned his speech to loving admiration of Heathcote woods and park, and to affectionate assurance of how often their cool, green beauty would be present to his imagination, as one of his happiest remembrances, amid the burning scenes of India.

"And each time uncle and I come out to enjoy their refreshment, we shall wish we could convey some of it to you by a breath; or waft you hither, Cecil, to partake of it with us," said Kate.

"Every breath of Kate's brings balm and comfort," said Cecil, with a passionate vehemence he seemed unable to restrain; "kindness, and affectionate goodness, and gentle consolation, breathe in her every word. She knows well how to make even parting less painful to her friends."

"The first time my words have ever had so healing a quality attributed to them," laughed she; "they have generally been supposed to contain nothing but venomous goading point, and fanged malice."

"The hardest judge would acquit her of malice," rejoined he. "Playful retort, sportive reprisal—like harmless summer lightning, which but serves to illumine our path with its brightness and beauty."

"It is almost a pity Alicia is not here, Cecil, to make you a pretty speech in return for yours. It deserves requital in kind, and, alas! I've none such in all my vocabulary."

"Perhaps, 'almost a pity,' but not quite," said the 'Squire. "I think we do very well without her. She's a very excellent, good girl, of course; and being related to us, though distantly, we're bound to show her all the kindness and attention we can. Still, I dare say, Cecil will be content to forego her pretty speeches, for the sake of enjoying this day quietly to ourselves, as we did so many in Italy together."

"More than content,—most delighted!" said Cecil. "The addition of that lump of sugar would have spoiled all. Thank Heaven, it's melted away, vanished, dissolved, disappeared!"

"None left! All gone! as nurse Matty used to say to me, when I was a naughty child, and would cry for more," said Kate.

"It will be our piteous phrase to-morrow, Kate, when we are left alone together. All our friends swept off at once! Rather hard upon us, isn't it? We shall find it difficult to bear."

"We'll console each other, uncle. You shall talk as cheerfully as you can, to me; and I'll sing,—if I can,—to you."

The afternoon seemed to creep heavily by, and yet the hours to fly. Cecil sat with Kate and her uncle in the oak parlour, trying to converse, but lapsing into frequent silence; endeavouring to maintain an equable strain, but perpetually faltering off into absent reverie and thoughtfulness.

The 'Squire, tired with his morning's exertion, drowsily reclined in his arm-chair, with his eyes closed.

"Uncle mine, don't go to sleep in that draught of air."

"Don't you torment me, you jade."

"I torment you, because I want to have you quite comfortable," said she. "That's mostly the reason why women torment men."

"A wifely kind of plea! You are worse than a wife to me, Kate."

"That I have long been. And mean to continue your rib-thorn to the end of our days!" she said, as she arranged a cambric handkerchief round his head, and drew down the window at his back, and tenderly kissed him, as she bent over him, and watched him fall into quiet slumber.

"Kate!" said the voice of Cecil Lascelles.

She looked up.

"Kate, will you come into the rose-walk with me? It is near enough for us to see, should the 'Squire wake and need you."

They stepped through the glass-door leading into the garden, and closed it noiselessly behind them.

This rose-walk was a beautiful spot. It was clustered thick with bushes of the flower which had given it its name. White rose, yellow rose, glowing damask, queenly pink, delicate China and Provence, rich moss, and luxuriant ever-beautiful, though homely cabbage-rose, were all here in their delicious per

fumed profusion, filling the air with loveliness of shape, colour and scent.

Cecil and Kate lingered up and down, amid the soft, westerly light and warmth, that shed its evening blandness upon the sweet place. At each turn, she gazed in through the glass-door, to satisfy her eyes with the sight of that placid, sleeping figure; while, according to an old habit of theirs, she and her companion remained enjoying, in perfect silence, the scene in which they were.

After a time, she softly made playful allusion to this way they had, of contentedly making a dual solitude by means of a dumb sympathy.

"A solitude of two, peoples their spot of earth with the joys of Paradise!" said Cecil. "Why cannot such an hour as this endure for ever? Kate, I could be content that it should be the last of my life,—unless you will share that life, and make all its coming years as full of joy as this one evening hour. The knowledge that I possess your love, as you possess mine, would bear me through any period of absence—make any toil easy."

"Cecil!" exclaimed Kate in breathless amazement.

"Kate, is it possible you have not seen how dearly, how madly I worship you? Is it possible you have not guessed my love, read it in my eyes, in my every word, though they may never have dared to express it in direct terms? I forced myself it is true, to refrain from speech, until I could speak all I wished. but it cannot be, Kate, that you have never perceived how passionately you are beloved?"

"No hint, no dream of suspicion, ever crossed my mind of this most unhappy truth," she said sorrowfully. "I believed that you loved me, as I love you, simply, affectionately, truly; but as friends, not——" her voice faltered; she could not finish the sentence.

"Unhappy truth!" echoed Cecil. "Does it grieve you, then, to find I love you, Kate?"

"Deeply," she answered; "loving me as you say you love;

for I feel that such love it is not in my power to give you in return. And *you* should not love in vain, Cecil."

"Kate, you wound me most, even while you speak most gently. Oh, why did you show me so much gentleness,—why, when you were rough with others, were you kind and yielding to me? It was that which lured me on to hope."

"Was I gentler to you than to others, Cecil?" said Kate, with a deep flush mounting into her face; "that was because I——"

She stopped suddenly.

"Because you cared for me less, you would say; because you did not care for me sufficiently to cross and oppose me. You could be gentle and affectionate to me, because your love for me was gentle and kindly; had it been more—had it been love, love itself, the passionate feeling that is burning here at my heart for you, Kate, you would have shown me less favour. Your very tenderness would have taught you to hide its sweet strength beneath pretended indifference. Ah, why was I, on my part, so slow to read the 'unhappy truth?'"

He paused, in great agitation; while she stood by his side, quite still, but trembling excessively.

"Kate," he said, at length, "I understand now why you treated me with such gentle, open affection; you loved me as a friend—a brother. I see now why you cannot give me the love I ask; it is because it is already——"

"Hush!" said Kate, laying her hand upon his arm, while the flush heightened to vivid scarlet; "do not speak it, Cecil! Do not say you see it! I will not see it,—own it, to myself. It is not so. It cannot be. Dear Cecil, do not think it!"

As Kate fixed her pleading eyes upon his, and poured forth her eager, imploring entreaty, Cecil, in his profound concern for her, almost lost the present sense of his own grief. He thought of Fermor's calm denial of entertaining any thoughts of Kate Ireton as a wife; and he even writhed to think of such a woman's love being given to one by whom it was neither sought nor returned.

"Kate," he said, "if you have not bestowed your love, grant me your liking, and it shall suffice; give me but such gentle, womanly regard, as you have shown all along, and it will content me. I would rather have your affectionate friendship, than the most passionate devotion from another. Kate, tell me you will be but the same to me you have hitherto been, with the hope of one day calling you mine, and I will think no time too long to wait; no probation too severe. I do not ask you to leave your home—to forsake your uncle. Remain here; be to him still a daughter. But promise to be my wife, when I return with wealth to share with you both, in one future house and home together ever after."

"You wring my heart, Cecil. I cannot; I cannot."

"Then you do——" he was bursting forth impetuously; when Kate clasped her hands with pathetic earnestness, and again her eyes fastened upon his face their beseeching look.

He could not resist this mute appeal, and forbore.

"Cecil," she said, "it is out of the very purity and truth of my regard for you, that I will not make you this promise. Loving you as I do,—affectionately, sincerely, as my dear friend and brother,—I will not promise to become your wife, knowing I can never bring you the free, full love, a wife should bring; above all, to one whose own love is so generous and devoted. Such faith as yours, Cecil, demands unreserved return. Such a heart, so lavishly, so trustingly given, should have the heart it covets, undividedly and exclusively yielded, as alone worthy to requite so rich a treasure. Esteeming you, valuing you, as I do, Cecil, I will never consent that your genuine, earnest, true love, shall have other than love itself to meet it. Neither you nor I, Cecil, could be contented with less than perfect mutual love in marriage. Between us two, let there be perfect love of its kind."

"Did I not say truly, that Kate knows how to make pain itself less painful to those she regards?" said Cecil, with a smile half sad, half tender. "That she does regard me with affectionate liking, I have her own gentle assurance; and the proud

consciousness of this shall console me for being forbidden to hope it ever can be more than liking. Kate, in addition to all your benign, womanly treatment of me this last memorable evening—grant me—do not refuse me——”

He held her hand against his cheek, to his lips, to his eyes, and strained it upon his heart.

“A friend,—a sister, will not be content with less than an embrace, in bidding farewell to one she holds so dear,” said Kate, in her own simple, ingenuous way, that had the confiding affectionateness of a child, with the graceful dignity of womanhood.

Cecil Lascelles folded her in his arms, with a fervent, deep-breathed “God for ever bless you, Kate!” and the next instant hurried from her.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was touching to see how zealously, how sedulously, Kate Iretton dedicated herself to her uncle's amusement, that he should not feel dull and spiritless on the departure of those whose presence had so lately made Heathcote Hall cheerly and gay. Her ingenuity in devising means of preventing his perceiving the lack of society, her assiduous watchfulness to keep him from feeling at a loss for conversation, her lively endeavour, by her own alacrity and sprightliness, to supply the place of more numerous talkers, was very beautiful to behold in its unselfishness, and instinct of loving attachment.

It was the more so, from her having her own secret load of heart-oppression to bear, at the very time she made this effort at extra cheerfulness and animation. But (while still sternly refusing—in her maidenly pride and innate reticence of modesty—to admit the belief that she could have bestowed her love unsought) she set a strict guard upon her own feelings, that they should deny themselves the indulgence of brooding over one particular subject, not only for self-respect's sake, in the sincere intention of regain-

ing serenity of spirit; but from a resolve that nothing should be suffered to interfere with her entire devotion to her uncle's comfort and happiness.

She succeeded so well, that never had she been more full of vivacity, more full of playfulness, and fanciful whimsies in behaviour and speech. For him, she seemed to combine, at once, her glad ease and freedom with Cecil, her banter and retort with Fermor, her spirited turns upon Miss White. For him, she seemed to become a girlish rattler again; a human butterfly or airy bird, or frolicsome midge in a sunbeam—a thing of light and life, and radiant, buoyant motion.

Only to look at her was joy to the old man's eyes; only to hear her brought gladness to his ears. Her very footstep was a pleasure; her voice a delight.

She studied his tastes; she forestalled his wishes; she tempted his appetite; she ministered to his ease. No time or thought bestowed on him was too much; no trifle too minute to be considered, in which he was concerned.

"Uncle of uncles, let me fill your glass," she said, while attending to him at dinner. "You are neglecting your wine—not taking your usual quantity; and I will not have you pay your womankind so bad a compliment as to let her suppose you don't consider her a worthy boon companion. For all the men-folk are no longer here to pledge you glass for glass, and drink with you foot to foot, yet I intend you shall look upon my gingle glass as the fair representative of a dozen masculine bumpers. Come, your toast! What shall it be?"

"A pleasant journey to Alicia, a prosperous voyage to Cecil, and a speedy home-return to Fermor Worthington!" said the 'Squire. "Aha, Kate! is that your vaunted toper prowess? Have you no more steadiness of hand than that comes to? Why, if it shake with the weight of a barely-filled glass, how will you ever achieve the feat of dropping a guinea's worth of silver into a brimmed one, without spilling a single drop?"

Kate laughed; then she said: "You shall perform a still pleasanter achievement in my eyes. Let me see how steadily a

hand more than double the age of mine can carry a full glass to the lips. Come, uncle, another glass! We'll have a wager upon it."

"But one more glass, then, my Kate. I don't think I care for wine as I used to do; it has somehow lost part of its relish."

"Not a whit, uncle mine! That's one of your fancies. Now, listen to me, and I'll prove to you that you like it just as well as ever. With soup, you would fain have me believe you do not care much to drink; yet a glass of Madeira comes not unwelcomely after gravy, or ox-tail, surely? With fish—well—no great matter; still, a glass of golden sherry following turbot or salmon, methinks, smacks palateably. You don't dislike wine, perhaps, with hot meat, but with cold, you can do without it; yet, a slice of cold roast beef, or a dainty sliver of ham, is admirably washed down with a glass of generous vintage. Game ushers in Burgundy, mighty well; some of your tawny, racy old port—your 'bottled velvet,' uncle—comes far from amiss after Cheshire or Stilton. Bright, delicate Lisbon you wouldn't refuse with tart or pudding; and I'd be sorry to be a jug of cold claret in your way at dessert. I should be reduced to emptiness and nothingness in a twinkling!"

"In whatever shape you might present yourself to me, my Kate, I believe, I should never do away with you," smiled he.

"In other words, knowing you can't have your cake and eat your cake, you'd rather starve than munch it up. Much obliged to you for your inference of the cakeliness of my composition!" said Kate. "But you'll think me a tipsy cake if I let my tongue run on at this giddy rate. I shall retreat to the oak-parlour, begging you to remark that my pace is perfectly sober, and that I expect you soon to join me there in a like state of sobriety and satiety—*alias*, properly dull satisfaction."

"I think this is the hour we miss them most, Kate," said the 'Squire, as he sat lounging in his arm-chair during twilight. Al-

though the summer was scarcely gone, the evenings began to be chilly, and Kate had had a fire lighted, knowing her uncle liked its warmth and cheerful blaze, while putting off the coming in of candles as long as possible. "I miss Cecil's gay, good-humoured laugh; I miss Fermor's constant kindness, and thoughtful, attentive ways—quietly preventing one's wishes, while he seemed most calm and unobservant. They're excellent, good fellows! I love them both dearly. Each, in their way, delightful companions. Cecil, perhaps, is the more sparkling and lively; but Fermor has sound sense, true feeling, and noble ways of thinking. Which of them—setting aside relationship, of course—which of the two do you like best, Kate?"

"It is difficult to say," she returned, after a moment, stooping over a vase of flowers upon the table by her; "I might as well try to tell you which I prefer of these two flowers—this forget-me-not, or this heart's-ease; one's blue, and the other's purple; each, as you say, good in their way, but quite different shades of character and colour."

"Well, the heart's-ease shall represent Cecil, and the other, Fermor. I think the blithe, light-hearted freshness of the one is not badly symbolized; it brightens and enlivens our season. But the steady forget-me-not, with its kindly remembrance, its earnest eyes of faith and loving constancy, precisely emblems our young kinsman. I could imagine Cecil ceasing to bear us in memory after a time. He is a creature of the present. He exists in the present. But, in sunshine or in shade, in health or in sickness, in prosperity or in reverse, present or absent, for months or for years, for life and for death, now and ever, I feel I could rely upon Fermor Worthington."

An impulse she could not resist made Kate imprint a kiss upon her uncle's hand, as it lay on the arm of his chair, near her.

"You will smile at my partiality for our own kith and kin, Kate; but, independently of that, he is a thorough fine fellow. Not that I'm ashamed of my leaning in favour of my own relation there's an old saying that blood's stronger than water, and——"

"Especially iron blood, eh, uncle?" said Kate, rallying her spirits to reply.

"Sauce-box! I only wish the Iron Cousin were here to answer for himself, as you ought to be answered."

In the silence that followed, Kate perceived that her uncle was dozing off, according to his frequent wont after dinner, for a twenty minutes' nap or so. She sat perfectly still, gazing into the fire-light. After a time, she turned, and drew forth the tuft of forget-me-nots from the vase, and held them in her hand, caressingly, tenderly. She recalled her uncle's late words, in murmured repetition over them, almost touching them with her lips, while her eyes were dreamily bent upon the fire.

Suddenly she started, "What am I doing?" she asked herself. "Am I not forgetting all my resolves, breaking through my own restrictions; indulging in worse than idle, fruitless thoughts?" She made a motion as if to throw the forget-me-nots into the fire, but drew back her hand. "I may surely keep these. They are but a few flowers. 'But a few flowers!'—yet how associated? Be true to the spirit of your own meaning, Kate! Be an honest girl with yourself! I cannot *throw* them away; but I will put them away, and look at them no more."

She deliberately went and reached down a book, laid the forget-me-nots between the leaves, and replaced the volume.

As she returned to her seat, her uncle woke up, and she proposed a game of chess, vowing to beat him unmercifully.

"And the beauty of beating your antagonist at chess, is, that you leave his self-love no loophole for complacent consolation. He knows, if he lose, it is through his own want of skill, since there is no particle of chance in the game, but all is sheer, hard, forethought and head-work. Look about you, uncle; for I mean to rout your forces front and rear, right and left, van and vanguard; upset 'em root and branch; defeat 'em utterly, wholly, and hopelessly!"

"You barbarous little villain, you! Take care *I* don't conquer!"

"Conquer away, uncle! Do your worst!"

Although Kate thus preserved her mastery over herself, and carried all off with unabated vivacity during the day, at night, when away from her uncle, when the hours of darkness shrouded her from every human eye—even, as it were, from her own—her tone of mind relaxed, her heart drooped, her very soul felt saddened and sick. She lay sleepless, motionless, and worn out; or she tossed wearily and restlessly to and fro, unable to get repose. She fought against this rebellion of the spirit, never once tamely yielding to its depressing influence, still less, wilfully giving way to its ascendancy, or allowing it insensibly to creep and increase upon her. All that lay in her own power she did, to resist its dangerous empire. She arose at her usual hour—nay, earlier, and devoted the space before her uncle descended to the breakfast room in pursuing her ordinary avocations; in reading, drawing, and studying music alternately. Her hardest effort was to command her voice to sing; but even this she accomplished by dint of strenuous, honest endeavour.

“My darling, I wish you wouldn’t think it necessary to get up at such labourers’ hours,” said Matty to her, one morning “If you were going out to field-work, to toil at weeding, or hay-making, at reaping, or harvesting, or gleaning, you couldn’t do more than you do now, a young lady born and bred, who needn’t to move a finger or stir a peg, if she don’t choose. And here are you, up by dawn, drudging away as soon as it’s daylight, at all those jigamarees of music, and painting, and reading, and drawing, like any negro governess, just as if you had to slave for your livelihood.”

“Perhaps I might find it hard, if I did it for a livelihood; but as I do it by choice, of my own accord, of my own free will, to please myself, there’s a charm in it, you see, Mattykin.”

“Ay, but you might take it a little more easy,” returned Matty. “You needn’t do it quite so fixed like, so duty like. You might set about it not quite so methodical, somehow, as if you *must* do it. You might make it not so plodding, you know; more like a pleasure, instead of a task, or a business.”

“You’re a nice distinguisher, upon my word, Mattykin. But

I need hardly remind you (who are a diligent reader yourself, of one book), that there is such a sentence as 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might;' and upon this principle it is, that I work at my amusements."

"Ay, but what I most mean is, that you shouldn't wear yourself out by setting to work so early. It's my opinion, you don't sleep over well; and you should lie an hour or two later, to make up lost time."

"An odd way of saving it! Slug-a-beds are among the worst spendthrifts and wasters of time. But what makes you think I don't sleep well? Stuff and nonsense! I sleep as soundly as ever—that is, when——"

"Yes, yes; when you do sleep. But I don't think you get to sleep much o'nights, now-a-days."

"Folly! absurd! what makes you take such ridiculous notions into your head, Matty?"

"Not so foolish, neither; I can see before my nose, and I can see that your eyes look heavy, and dim, and stiff, when I come to you first of a morning; and I can hear you toss and tumble—ay, and sigh, too, late at night, when you ought to be fast as a church. Don't tell me that you sleep as you ought, Miss Kate, darling."

"Matty, you must have been listening at my room-door, for you to have discovered this; and I wo'n't have you do it, and I wo'n't have you watch my looks, and make out all sorts of preposterous fancies about me,—that have no foundation but your own silly anxiety."

"None so silly! I'm not blind or deaf, and I know when anything's going wrong, 'specially with my own darling. Ah, this love! this love! But it's only what we must all come to, I suppose, sooner or later."

Kate was speechless from surprise, from anger, from agitation.

"I'm not so blind but I can see, that ever since that day, a change has come over you, Miss Kate, my darling. I'm not so blind but I can see—for all you carry it off so spiritily—that

you've never been quite yourself, really and truly, from that time. I'm none so blind, but I could see you walking in the rose-walk that evening, after the news of his going away to India; and though I couldn't make out much of what you both *said*, yet it wasn't because I was deaf; and I could *see* you, fast enough, both of you."

"So, then, you have been watching me again! For all I told you I wouldn't have it done—for all I warned you. Matty, I don't choose to have a spy about me. I'll have no eaves-dropping busy-body near me. Matty, you shall never dress me again."

"Miss Kate!" exclaimed the nurse. "What, I, that held you in my arms when you first drew breath; that nursed your own mother living and dying; that starved for her and with her; that begged in the streets for her new-born baby."

"Matty, you make a merit of your services; you reproach me with your past good deeds; you boast of them, and think they give you a right to treat me as you will; to meddle with me, watch me, play the spy and the eaves-dropper; and I think no such thing. For all that you have been to me, I am grateful—I can never forget it; but neither can I forget what you have done since; and after I warned you too! Matty, I will never have you about me again; you shall never more dress me, or wait upon me."

And Kate Ireton walked straight out of the room.

The next morning, on awaking, she missed the kindly voice, and petting ministry of the faithful old nurse; but she kept to her resolution not to ring for her, or send for her, or accept her personal services any more.

In the course of the day, remembering some needle-work she had intended to finish, she said to one of the servants, who chanced to pass her in the hall, "Oh, Robert! tell Mrs. Martha to send me down my——"

"Mrs. Martha's gone away, Miss Kate."

"Gone away!"

"Gone away, Miss. She left the Hall last night. She's gone down to live at the village. She means to take a lodging there, I heard Dorothy say, on account of some words as passed between her and you, Miss Kate, which she told Dorothy she couldn't stomach nohow. And as you had said she shouldn't dress you in future, she wouldn't be wanted, and wouldn't stay. Leastways, that's how Dorothy repeated it to me; but I can't think Mrs. Martha, who's lived in the family I don't know how long, and loved our Miss Kate like the apple of her eye, could speak so huffish as this. However, she's gone."

"She pleases herself," said Kate. "When she has had her sulk out, she will return. She knows we shall always be glad to see her up at the Hall; and as soon as she's tired of her banishment, she'll come back."

Early one morning, Kate in her self-imposed task of checking heart-thought, by activity of mind and diligence of fingers, was playing through a sonata that required all her attention to master its difficulties, when the room door was softly opened, and her uncle's old servant, Robert, said in an agitated, awe-stricken whisper, "Miss Kate, I wish you would come to master. I don't know what to make of him—but I don't like his looks—he don't seem quite right, somehow."

Kate's life-current seemed to stand still within her. But she put a strong constraint upon herself; roused all her fortitude and energy, and said in a firm calm way, that an instant ago she could not have believed possible, "Tell me how you mean, Robert; tell me as we go."

She went with swift but steady foot towards her uncle's room, while Robert poured forth his incoherent account.

"I got the 'Squire up, Miss Kate; he seemed pretty well then. But while I was handing him his things to dress, he

turned very still and helpless, all of a sudden. He seemed as if he couldn't lift his arms, or make any use of 'em. He sat all lifeless and lumpish, someway. He is sitting so now; and his eyes look fixed, and he don't seem able to speak, I think." And the good old serving-man burst into a passion of tears and sobs.

"Don't Robert; be as quiet, as collected, as you can. Dear, good Robert, for your master's sake, contain yourself." And Kate entered her uncle's room.

At sight of her, the rigid features relaxed, there came a softening over the poor stricken face; and he tried to hold out his hand towards her, but it would not be.

She took it into her own, she held him in her arms, and drew his head upon her bosom, whispering gentle, cheering, tender words. Then she said in a low, distinct voice to the weeping servant, "Robert, bid Ben Dimble ride off immediately to Dingleton for Doctor Burton."

An effort at speech from the 'Squire made Kate bend all her faculties to comprehend what he endeavoured to form into words.

"Send for Jack—Jack Weldon—write," were the scarce articulate words.

"While they saddle the horse, I will get ready the letter. Go, Robert; lose no time."

With rapid pen, Kate wrote the note to summon her uncle's old friend; and before another five minutes were over, she heard the rapid gallop of the horse, as the messenger sped away.

Then came the terrible period of waiting; the feeling that she could do nothing; that she must sit and watch a condition that she knew not how to alleviate; that she must patiently support the suspense, the agony, of seeing moments swell into quarter-hours, half-hours, nay, perhaps hours, while every instant was of consequence to arrest the fatal course of that dread hand which seemed visibly converting him into stone before her eyes.

A leaden immobility lay upon his countenance, and held his limbs powerless. He appeared to be in no pain; but the ab-

sence of all sensation had a frightful ill-omened look of blank and void, that was almost worse to behold than suffering. The one would at least have afforded some indication of a medium to convey relief, or suggested some mode of administering ease; and even an attempt to assuage or soothe, would have been a certain comfort to her. But in this negative state, this fearful, quiescent, passive nothingness, no assistance, no help could she offer. The whole seemed some appalling dream, as she sat there, watching by that motionless figure, herself scarcely less smitten into stillness.

The garish sunlight that streamed through the nearest window, was like a cruel mockery; the starry blossoms of the jessamine that clustered thickly there, and sent in its delicious perfume upon the fresh morning air, struck her almost as an offence, a hateful, oppressive, inopportune greeting of gentleness and beauty, jarring against this so deep misery and affliction.

But gradually the unfailing sustainment and holy influence of Nature shed its gracious balm upon her; and, as she gazed up into the blue serene of heaven, her heart softened and melted, and those divine words mirrored themselves in her soul: "O, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

There was a slight movement; the chest heaved; the face changed; a peace, beautiful to look upon, crept over the features; the lips gently trembled; and Kate could see that his heart was engaged in fervent, hopeful prayer.

"Kate, my child!"

"I am here, uncle."

"Kate, my Kate!—God Almighty bless, comfort, protect——" The voice died away inwardly, the quivering lips were still, and the eyes closed.

There was a dread pause.

The lips never moved again. The eyes never more unclosed.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Good Dr. Burton—the kind, prompt, active country doctor—came running up stairs, two steps at a time, pulling off his gloves as he mounted, flung his hat into one corner of the room, his cane into another, and drew his lancet out as he entered the room, and strode towards the recumbent figure.

But a second sufficed to his practised eye; he saw that no help could avail—that all was over.

“Good God! What’s that?” he said, as his foot encountered somewhat he had not observed before, on the floor, close beside the couch.

It was Kate Ireton, who, when she witnessed that last expiring sigh, and saw that it was death, had sunk in a heap upon the ground, senseless.

The good Doctor raised her in his arms, and carried her into her own room, and laid her on the bed.

“Poor child!” he said; “this is a cruel blow for her. Here, some of you, my good people,” he added, turning to the sorrowful group of servants, who had gathered tremblingly around, “send her own woman to take care of your young mistress; she’s in a deep swoon, poor thing! and ought to have some one about her, near, to watch her when she comes to herself.”

“Her own woman,—her nurse,—Miss Martha, sir; she’s not here, if you please, sir—that is, Doctor.”

“No matter; send any one of the women servants.”

“Old Dorothy, the housemaid, sir—Doctor, I mean; she’ll—”

“Ay, ay, she’ll do as well as another. All women are more or less nurses by nature. They take to it kindly; it comes as pat to them as it comes awkwardly to us. Bid her make haste.”

“Yes, sir; but she’s old. We’re all of us old. The Squire

would turn none of us away, because we grew old. We shall never have such a master again ! ”

When Kate Ireton at length returned to a consciousness of existence from her death-like swoon, evening was closing in. She, at first, neither knew where she was, nor what had happened. But soon, remembrance stabbed sharp and piercingly to her heart, and she uttered a heavy moan.

Old Dorothy stood by her, and attempted some homely, well-meant consolation ; matter-of-course words, that grate upon the ear with their impotence to carry sense or soothing to the soul-stricken mourner.

Kate lay looking at her with lustreless, vacant eye ; neither weeping nor sobbing, but breathing profound sighs, with now and then those deep, dull, inward moans.

This dumb, tearless grief perplexed the good woman, who felt wholly unable to deal with it. She could only stand there, crying bitterly, and begging her young mistress to “ try some tea.”

“ It'll do ye good, Miss Kate ; I'm sure it would. A cup o' tea always does me good in the worst o' troubles. Do'ee now, Miss Kate ; only try it.”

And old Dorothy hobbled away ; in her zealous desire to prevail with her young mistress to essay this favourite remedy, she went in search of some for her.

She was no sooner alone, than Kate feebly struggled to rise ; but her eyes swam, her head reeled ; and, on attempting to set foot to the ground, she fell prone. When Dorothy returned with the steaming cup of tea, she found her in another strong fainting-fit.

It was dead of night when she again revived ; but her senses wandered, and she spoke rapidly and incoherently.

“ I must go ! Do not hold me ! I must go, I tell you ! I must see him again ! ”

"Hush! Miss Kate; don't'ee take on so. Hush, then!"

"Why do you bid me hush? Who bid you restrain me—and chide me? I cannot be silent—I must go! He will be taken away before I can reach him—before I can see him again."

She broke from the old woman's arms, and threw herself out of bed, staggering wildly and blindly forward. But again she dropped senseless.

In the morning, when Dr. Burton came to enquire after her, he found her in this dangerous state, having had repeated fainting-fits, and scarcely recovering from one ere falling into another.

He declared that all depended upon Kate's being kept quiet. "Her very life," he said, to Dorothy, "depends upon it; you must keep her quiet."

"Ay, it's all very well for doctors to give orders," grumbled the poor old creature; "but I'll be whipped if their orders can always be attended to. Here's our Miss Kate, who's never been said nay to all her life, and don't know what it is to obey, or do what she's told, is to be kept quiet, whether she will or no. Not an archangel from Heaven could make her keep quiet, if she hasn't a mind to it!"

But Kate seemed to have no mind for anything else now. She sank into utter passiveness. She lay, incapable of stirring, of taking note of anything, of moving, or seeing, or speaking.

The second day, Dorothy came to her bed-side, and said: "The gentleman wants to see you, if you please, Miss Kate."

Kate gave a convulsive start. "Gentleman! What gentleman?" she faintly exclaimed.

"The lawyer gentleman, Miss. Him as come down last night. He's been sitting in the library, a-ferreting among master's papers, I hear. But Robert says it's all right; for that he was sent for by master himself."

"True," said Kate, putting her hand to her head, and striving to think sanely and steadily.

'And he's just sent to say he wants to see you, Miss Kate, if you'll step down to him in the library, he says.'

Kate made an effort to sit up—to get up. She leaned upon

Dorothy's arm ; but no sooner did she attempt to walk, than she tottered, trembled from head to foot, and sank back upon the bed.

" You see—I cannot. Tell him so."

As Dorothy assisted her young mistress to lie down again, she muttered : " I don't know whether it a'n't worse—more heart-breaking like—to see her try and do as she's told, than to see her following her own head. She don't seem like herself—nat'ral, somehow—when she's this way."

And Dorothy potted down stairs to the library, where she put her head in at the door, and said : " My young lady can't come, sir ! "

" Humph ! A tolerably cool message," was the dry reply. " I remember, of old, she was a mighty peremptory, wilful little personage ; but Hal loved her, and——Harkee, Mrs. Abigail ! Tell your young lady that I am obliged to return to town, now ; but that I shall make a point of returning to pay the last respect to my dear old friend, her uncle ; and shall then *expect* to see her. Tell her my exact words, if you please, my good old lady ; that is, as nearly as you can," he added to himself. " Your tribe are not famed for bearing messages faithfully, or repeating accurately. We should have less trouble than we have with blundering witnesses were it otherwise."

The few followings days wore away in the same outward apathy with Kate. But, internally, she was devoting every effort to gain strength for carrying out her purpose of once more visiting her uncle's room, to take a last farewell look of that beloved face, to breathe a last farewell kiss upon those lips which had received and bestowed so many warm, living, happy caresses ; to utter one last farewell prayer beside him who had been the object of her daily prayers ever since she knew what prayer meant. For him had been her first-lisped, childish " God bless dear uncle ! " for him had been poured forth her fondest, tenderest

aspirations; for him had been her earliest thought on waking; for him, her last supplication ere she slept; in him had concentrated her profoundest feelings of grateful adoration poured forth to the Almighty Father who had bestowed this earthly parent upon her orphaned existence. He it was who drew forth, in ceaseless flow, her most fervent, her most pious rapture of thanksgiving.

As the time drew near when she knew he would be borne away, never more to be beholden by her in this world, her eagerness grew to intensity; but she sought to still it, that she might gain power of frame and limb, out of composure of spirit.

Her late struggle with her own heart, previously to this last crowning blow, had been more severe than Kate imagined. The sustained effort to appear at ease, when secretly her feelings were in ferment; the perpetual strain upon them to control and stifle their natural working, and quell their agitation; the endeavour not only to suppress any outward token of them, but to forbid herself any actual encouragement of them—not only to prevent their seeing the light, but to strangle them in their very birth—had wrought a powerful effect upon her. But when, in addition to this, came the overwhelming shock of her bereavement, she sank, stunned and prostrate.

Wearied out with suffering, she had, at length, fallen into a heavy slumber. It lasted some hours. When she awoke, the lamp was burning low, and the room was in silence, save for the contented snoring of poor old Dorothy, who, seeing her young mistress at rest and asleep, had gradually yielded to the welcome example.

Kate raised her head from the pillow, leaned upon her elbow, and sought to learn whether she had indeed gathered the strength so desired—so eagerly wooed.

She felt that she was stronger—really stronger—strong enough to get up, stand up, to support herself, and walk. She took the lamp in her hand, and went softly forth. The air in the outer gallery farther revived her; and as she took the passage leading to her uncle's room, she was conscious of being

bodily equal to the farewell her soul had vowed to take. This consciousness fortified her yet more, and she passed on, grateful for the vouchsafed power.

"One instant's pause at the chamber-door; and, the next, she entered. Pale as the corpse that lay stretched there, yet upborne by pious courage and faithful, reverent affection, Kate approached, and looked upon that beloved face. The deep peace, the tranquil, consummate content, still dwelt upon the features, and she sank upon her knees, blessing God for that signal of Earth's final thought, of Heaven's opening promise.

Pouring forth her heart, long she knelt. Then arose, filled with a serenity and trust she could not have believed, a few hours since, would ever be hers again to feel. And so, with one last kiss impressed upon those cold, dear lips, she withdrew, returned to her own chamber, threw herself upon her bed, and slept once more the sleep of youth, of saner health, and calmer mind.

"Deary me! but you're looking a deal better, though, this morning, Miss Kate. A'most quite yourself, as a body may say," remarked old Dorothy, as she saw the expression of Kate's countenance, and noticed the less deathly hue it wore, when she woke late next day. "Ah, most folks gets better, so soon as the funeral's once over," she added to herself. "Nothing like opened shutters, and the body taken away and buried, for bringing people round. It brightens everything up again; mourners and all, somehow."

"Did you not deliver some message, when you called me, Dorothy? I did not rightly understand. Some one enquiring for me in the library, I think you said. Surely not."

"Yes, Miss Kate, but there is. It's that lawyering gentleman. He joined the train, and took the lead, and settled everything, and ordered about, and managed how all should be. And when the gentry went home in their carriages, after it was over he marched hisself into the library again, as grand as you please, and sent me to fetch you, Miss Kate."

"I am ready," said Kate. "It is Mr. Weldon. He has a right here. He was asked here. I will go down to him at once."

The broad glare of daylight struck upon her senses, dazzling her sight, and oppressing her darkened heart, as she descended the stair-case, and crossed the large old hall. But she summoned firmness, and proceeded. She turned the handle of the library-door, and went in.

The lawyer was seated at the table, looking over papers; but on seeing Kate enter, he rose, with the instinctive respect inspired by the presence of a great and sincere sorrow, placed a chair for her, and then quietly resumed his own.

Kate did not take the offered seat; but walked to the fireplace, and leaned against the mantel-piece, with her hand supporting her forehead, as she stood looking at him who occupied the place where her uncle used to sit.

"I sent for you, young lady, to hear some business details with which it is necessary you should be made acquainted. I could have wished to have consulted you, before I took any active steps; but it seems you could not attend to me then,—hadn't leisure, or inclination,—as I inferred from your curt message. I, having so much leisure, and so very much inclination to dance attendance upon young ladies, was, of course, to wait your pleasure. But this I was not able to do; having to return to town, to my own affairs. Between whiles, however, I found time to look into those that I saw had little chance of settlement if I didn't take them in hand; and which, accordingly, I felt entitled, nay, called upon, to do. I'm glad therefore, young lady, that you've thought fit to see me this time, instead of sending me any such second message."

"What was the first?" said Kate.

"That you couldn't come."

"I literally could not. I made the attempt. But I couldn't. I dropped down. Didn't they tell you?"

The lawyer took a pinch of snuff, and turned to the table, and routed among the papers, and muttered to himself: "I'm a

tetchy, peppery old ass ! I forgot she must be in grief,—in much grief. She looks pale, ill. Won't you sit down, young lady ?" he added aloud ; " I have much to tell you, that you must listen to."

" I can stand ; I am quite able to stand. Go on ; I am listening."

" When I was summoned hither, I found, as I expected,—knowing human nature, and my friend Hal's in particular,—no will, no insurance effected, affairs in confusion, nothing but disorder, improvidence, want of forethought and foresight, carelessness, recklessness, and debt."

" How dare you ! How dare you to speak so, of,—of,—of *him* !" And Kate Ireton broke into the first tears she had shed since her loss.

The lawyer looked at her in grave astonishment. Then he took snuff again, turned to the table, and began writing ; partly to give her time to recover, partly in ire at her vehemence. He disliked to see women cry,—it was foolish, irrational, useless, and very unpleasant to witness ; particularly when the woman was so young and so very beautiful. As Kate stood, her face buried in her handkerchief, giving way to the long-pent flood, Mr. John Weldon eyed her askance, feeling exceedingly uncomfortable, fidgetty, and angry. Then he took another pinch of snuff, as if to gather patience beneath this inevitable, but perhaps salutary evil. He felt it might relieve her, ease her heart ; and therefore he had no right to check it, but must submit to the infliction of beholding it, so long as she chose to weep on.

But Kate Ireton seldom wept ; and never gave way to weeping. She dried her eyes, after this one paroxysm of irrepressible emotion ; looked up, and said : " Say what you have to say, if you please. I am attending. I will not interrupt you again."

" Long ago," began Mr. Weldon ; but he was obliged to clear his voice before he went on : " long ago, when you were a little creature, and I saw how entirely my old friend's heart was bound up in you, I tried to persuade him to do two all important things

—insure his life, and make his will. He did neither. He promised me to do both; but he did neither. I ought to have known better than to have trusted a promise of that sort. I ought to have seen that he did it. I ought to have made him do it—ascertained that it was done,—knowing how essential it was to the securing of his own wishes with regard to you, in whom his happiness was centred. I take blame to myself for this,—loving him as I did, yet being aware of his foible, his peculiarities. I need not tell you that your uncle hated trouble; that he was too careless a fellow to look much into expenditure, too good a fellow to be fond of money, and too unworldly a fellow to have the management of it. He let his own come in, he regarded not how, so that it sufficed for your and his wants; he let it go, he heeded not how, so that it supplied just what was necessary for the support of the estate, and the support of you two. It has held out till now; but the crisis must have come soon, and perhaps he is best spared the pain of witnessing it. The estate devolves to the heir-at-law; while the personal property, when realized, will cover all debts, so that his honour will be saved. I think I read you well enough, young lady, to know that this thought will outweigh with you the regret of seeing Heathcote pass into other hands. When the personals are sold, and all is paid off, I fear there will remain but little. Perhaps a sum sufficient to yield you somewhere about thirty or forty pounds yearly; and that, though a poor pittance, is yet better than some hapless souls can call their own. It shall be placed in the Dingleton bank for you; and will be ready there, for you to draw monthly, quarterly, or half-yearly, as may suit your convenience.”

Kate bowed her head.

“It is a maxim of mine, that when disagreeable things have to be done, they’re better done at once; I have therefore arranged that the sale shall take place without delay. The people will be down here to put things in train to-morrow. Now, as I think it will be a pain to you to see strangers coming hither, bringing noise and confusion with them, into all your haunts of accustomed privacy, young lady, and to see the old Hall disturbed and

dismantled, you will do well to leave the place before these gentry arrive."

"You are right,—I shall go,—immediately."

"You have friends, probably, in the neighbourhood, with whom you can stay for the present?" said the lawyer, in a tone of interest.

"I have friends," said Kate.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Mr. John Weldon. "Make the most of them. They don't grow on every bush. They're by no means common as blackberries, nor for every season, like gorse-blossom. Their golden bloom is apt to become blighted, or frost-nipt, nay, to wither quite away, when adverse weather sets in. Gather as much of it as you can, and while you can; make your harvest while the sun shines. You have connections, I think, in the county? If I mistake not, there are the Whites, of Eggham Park, and the family at Worthington Court, between whom and my old friend some kind of relationship existed. They'll not see his niece want for anything, for their own credit's sake."

"She would rather starve than——" Kate was beginning passionately; but she checked herself, and added, in a sedate tone: "I meant, I have two kind friends in Dr. and Mrs. Meadows, our good vicar and his wife."

"Humph! A country parson, with a wife and ten children, isn't much of a patron, compared with a rich relation. The good man can't do any great things for you, however willing he may be. Now the rich relation, though he may think his poor one a bore and an incumbrance, yet his own pride will prevent his letting her want bread."

"So long as she can earn a crust for herself, she need never trouble a soul," said Kate. "I have my own plans for future independence, and I trust to be able to carry them out."

The lawyer smiled and shook his head, as if touched with that emotion which experience feels, when it hears youth speak thus.

"My good young lady, you have two awkward points for a girl to begin the world with, by herself—beauty and pride. The

former will lay you open to insults, which the latter will make doubly hard to bear. Beauty will tempt attack, while pride, instead of being a protection, will only serve to provoke a desire to lower it. You can't abate your beauty—and perhaps wouldn't if you could—women are generally content to run all risks rather than be without that too often fatal possession; but you can give up some of your pride, and I advise you to dispose of the whole stock of that worthless commodity at the very earliest opportunity."

"I have never been apt in taking advice; I am not accustomed—not proficient at it," said Kate, with something of her old tone.

"Then make a trial now. A lawyer seldom gives feeless advice. Accept it when it offers. It'll be something for you to begin the world with."

"I hope to begin the world, and to go through the world, with absolute independence."

"'Tis a pretty vision—but there is no such reality in life. No one can be absolutely independent; not a throned monarch himself, can be entirely independent of his fellow-mortals. But without compromising your independence, young lady, you can receive the wholesome counsel of an old fellow who has looked upon the world for nearly threescore years. And he advises you, in all kindness of spirit towards one whom his old friend Harry Heathcote dearly loved, to try and root out pride as a vile, rank, spurious growth—a rotten, miserable, broken reed, that will prove a treacherous support, and desert you in your utmost need, if you unwisely trust it."

Kate went straight up to the old lawyer, and offered him her hand.

"I hope you will forgive me my ungracious speech—my ungracious behaviour, Mr. Weldon," she said. "Had it not been that my heart was very sore, and made me view all things sorely, I should hardly have remained so long unmoved by your patience and forbearance."

"I believe we have both something to forgive each other," he

replied. "I have been testy and inconsiderate. In my ungainly bachelor way—little accustomed to deal with girlish feelings or womanish ways—I must have hurt you, without knowing it, far less wishing it."

"Let me thank you for the voluntary trouble you have taken, the valuable time you have generously bestowed—upon—upon—your friend's affairs. And for having secured something from the wreck for his Kate's maintenance. Your best thanks will be the thought that in so doing you have done what would most truly content him."

"My dear young lady, say no more. We understand each other," said the lawyer, shaking her hand warmly between his own white, shrivelled, gentlemanly ones; "and as I must now away to London—I see the postchaise is waiting at the hall-door—I wish you would let me take you with me, and set you down in my way, at your friend the vicar's house."

"You forget that a carriage does not suit with my altered fortunes. I shall walk down to the village. And if ever my plans of independence achieve independent fortune, and I come to ride in a carriage of my own, be assured one of my first visits shall be to Mr. Weldon."

"Well, well," he returned; "if, meantime, you find that independence might be the better for a little help, don't fail to apply to me for it. I shall take it as a sign that you have adopted my advice, and sent pride to the right-about; and that will be a gratification to my own pride, you know. Farewell, my dear young lady. Remember John Weldon, if you need any aid that we can give you."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FULL of the revived and strengthened spirit which this interview with her uncle's old friend, the lawyer, had imparted, Kate at once began her task of leave-taking, determined to adopt his kindly hint of quitting the old place forthwith.

She felt even now reconciled to the thought of abandoning Heathcote, since he was no longer there who had made it home to her. How could she have borne to live on there without him? Yet when she came to bid adieu to all those wonted spots, the scenes of so much past happiness, she found it difficult to part from them, knowing she should never dwell among them again.

She took a sad leave of the room—her uncle's own room—in which she had last beheld him alive, had last of all beheld him dead. She gathered some of the clusters of jessamine from the window, and placed them tenderly in her bosom, as she remembered that with their rich incense-like perfume had come the first softening of feeling which enabled her to seek peace from its truest source.

She bade a regretful adieu to her own cosy elegant room, fitted up with all her fond uncle's care for her comfort, with all her own neat and graceful regard to tasteful appointment.

She lingered in the little dressing-room—her music-den—and hung fondly over the old harpsichord, remembering the many quiet hours of improving practice she had passed there, and that one memorable evening, when she had first played and sung to other ears than her own.

She visited the little sketching-den at the top of the house, looking long and wistfully at the magnificent park view which its window commanded, while she reviewed in thought a certain morning, when its solitude had been invaded and shared. But she would not allow herself too long reflection upon this theme; and with a resolute self-constraint, she was leaving the room, when she hastily returned, selected one sketch from among the rest, and hurried away with it.

From the library, and from other rooms, she collected all her own especial books—keepsakes and presents at various times from her uncle and friends—books that she could indisputably and conscientiously call her own. For Kate had made a scruple to herself of leaving the whole of the personal property entire and intact, out of an impression that the more there could be left, the more sure it was to realize sufficient to clear her uncle's name from any imputation of not having satisfied all claims.

In her innocent anxiety for this, she had left all her own drawings, and drawing materials, in the sketching-den, thinking they might perhaps fetch something, among the rest of the odds and ends up there; and that in all probability she should not be able to pursue so mere an accomplishment, in the life of humble labour to which she looked forward as her probable future one.

Something of the same motives swayed her, in resolving to leave behind her all her music. Her last-visited room was the oak parlour, where her happiest hours had been spent, and where also stood her own piano-forte—Fermor Worthington's birthday gift. Partly to restrict her thoughts from dwelling upon its donor, partly that she might consecrate its last-heard tones to those thoughts which she felt should alone fill her heart at this moment, she sat down and played such airs as might form a kind of dirge for her loss of him who was both parents in one, her loss of home, of all.

She played the grand and solemn movements of the Burial Service, where Croft and Purcell put the might of their English fervent hearts into those sublime chords, accompanying those simply sublime words. Some of these words she could not help breathing forth into murmured self-consolation: "He that believeth in me shall never die." "Of whom may we seek succour but of thee, O Lord?" "Thou knowest the secret of our hearts; shut not thy merciful ears unto our prayers." "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; they rest from their labour."

From Mozart's divine requiem strain of the "Recordare," she drew strength with sweetness; courage with gentlest, tenderest beauty.

As a lofty soul sustaining close, she played Handel's elevated and elevating hymn of hope and sacred trust: "Then round about the Starry Throne;" ending with that glorying phrase, so gloriously expressed and rendered into sound, "And triumph over Death and thee, O Time!"

Kate Ireton was no usual indulger in tears; but perhaps the more for their rare indulgence, did they, when yielded to, bring relief and benefit. As she played, the music worked its own be

nign potency of influence, and tears fell into her bosom like soft rain—refreshing dew—shedding peace upon her heart, and infusing confidence and reliance into her spirit.

Her next farewell was to the old servants, her uncle's tried and faithful dependants, most of whom had grown grey in his service, and who repaid his bounteous kindness with true attachment. When Kate saw poor old Robert's genuine grief—how it had stricken and changed the man into feebleness and sudden age, and almost visible decay—her heart smote her with something like remorse, lest in the selfishness of her own sorrow she had been forgetful of his, and neglectful of himself.

But the old serving-man spoke affectionately to her, and cheeringly; bidding her be of good heart in her trouble, and telling her—knowing, he said, it would please Miss Kate's kind heart—that Mr. Weldon had behaved very thoughtful and kind; that he had spoken to the gentlefolks, master's friends, that morning, when they had assembled to follow the 'Squire to the grave, and had tried to interest them in procuring places for all the old servants.

"Cook and Dorothy are to be up at High-chase House; Joseph is to go to Crofthurst; Martin coachman is going there too; Ben Dimble's got a place at 'Squire Huntley's; and 'Squire Acremead has taken me. So you see, Miss Kate, no need to fret about us. We're well provided for, you see. All you've got to do now, is to think about getting on well yourself; and keep up, for the sake of dear old master, who'd have broke his heart to know you'd pine."

"I shall bear up bravely, depend on it, dear good Robert. God bless you all, and good-bye."

Kate's last visit was to the stable, to take an unwitnessed leave of the horse she had so long ridden—upon which she had enjoyed so many happy rambles with her uncle—and of the one which had been his own favourite. White Bess and Chestnut Phillis were hardly less objects of liking than had they been of her own race. She had an almost human and individual affection for these two animals. She whispered fondling words to them, as she fed them for the last time from her hand, and patted their

glossy throats, and stroked their sleek and shining flanks. The gentle creatures seemed to understand her mournful petting sentences, and to respond, in their own dumb fashion, by turning their heads round to hers, as she leaned against their shoulder and at last fairly flung her arms about the neck of each, in turn.

When at last she came forth from the stable-door, she saw Ben Dimble.

"I knew you'd come to see the horses the last thing afore you went, Miss Kate," said he, in a husky voice, and keeping his eyes fixed upon the ground, lest he should see by hers that she was crying. "I knew you'd come here, so I waited."

"To bid me good-bye? Thank you, Ben. And I was in hopes I should see you, Ben, before I went, to ask you to do something for me."

"Oh, Miss Kate, that *is* kind! That *is* kind of you to think of!" And Ben, in his sudden joy, looked up, and saw that his young mistress was not crying, which relieved him unspeakably.

"Ben, I want you to bring me down my trunk to the village. It is all ready packed; but I should like you, better than any body, to bring it away for me."

"Thank you, kindly, Miss Kate—thank you kindly. And where shall I find you, Miss Kate?"

"Why, I am going to try and learn whereabouts my Matty has taken lodgings. I'm afraid I didn't behave altogether——"

"I know where she lodges!" burst in Ben, unable to contain himself. "She lodges with Ruth Field. When Ruth Field's mother died, it chanced to be at the very time Mistress Martha left us. And just as Ruth thought she must give up her cottage, as she couldn't afford to keep it all herself, Mistress Martha offered to come to her, and very glad they both were."

"And who may Ruth Field be? And whereabouts does she live?" said Kate.

"Not know Ruth Field?" said Ben, reddening to scarlet. 'You saw her at the school-house that morning, Miss Kate; and

you spoke to me about her when you came out; don't you remember?"

"I remember," said Kate.

"She's the under-teacher,—sub-monitress,—they call her. The head-monitress was discharged last week for harsh conduct, I hear; and they're going to elect a new one. I hope she'll be better than the last, for—for Ruth's sake."

"You seem much interested in this Ruth, Ben," smiled Kate. "You seem to know all about her movements, as well as all those that affect her."

Ben looked down. "I knew her from that high, Miss Kate," he said at length, twisting his hat in his hand, and then holding it a foot or two from the ground. "And I've always known her good; good, when she was strong and fresh-coloured, and straight; good, when she grew weak and white, and bent."

"And this good, mild Ruth Field lives in the cottage adjoining the school-house? And my Matty lodges with her, you say, Ben?"

"Yes, Miss Kate; and I think Ruth takes to her all the more kindly and likingly, because she's bed-ridden; it 'minds her of her own mother, who lost the use of her limbs, and kept her bed for the last year and more of her life."

"Bed-ridden! what do you mean, Ben?" said Kate. "You surely don't mean Matty is bed-ridden."

"But I do, though, Miss Kate. She took the rheumatics very bad, after leaving the old Hall, where she had all that heart could wish, and lived well, and lay warm, like any lady of the land. Whether it was the sudden change from our fine old house to a cottage, I can't rightly say; but bed-ridden she's been ever since, poor soul!"

"My poor Mattykin! This, then, was the reason—but I will see her myself. Ben, I may rely upon you to come to the cottage to-morrow with the trunk?"

"It shall be there to-night, Miss Kate," said Ben. "And Miss Kate, before you go, I know you'll be glad to hear I'm to be at Huntley Lodge.—Squire Huntley promised me, to-day."

"I heard so, Ben; I rejoice to find you'll have so good a place."

"Ay, Miss Kate; but it's not that. Good place or bad place, I wouldn't have gone to it, if I hadn't known that 'Squire Huntley is to buy all master's horses. Wherever they went, I meant to go, if it was in the power of mortal man to do it. Whatever became of White Bess and Chestnut Phillis, I must ha' followed 'em, and tried to ha' been groom to 'em still."

"I'm truly glad to think that they have both fallen to one master, who is also to be yours, Ben. I needn't say, take care of them, Ben. I know you love them both, as dearly as I do."

"Nobody can love 'em better, Miss Kate. I'd give up my own dinner, any day, to be sure that they had theirs, poor beasts."

And as Kate Ireton turned to go, Ben went into the stable.



CHAPTER XXXIX.

KATE did not proceed by the avenue, but struck across the park lawns. The avenue was the approach from the carriage-road to the village; while the one she took was a foot-path little frequented, that led by some fields a shorter and pleasanter way. The dusty road, the steep hilly descent, the public thoroughfare, were instinctively avoided; while the grassy park glades, the sloping meadows, the quiet river-side walk, where there was little chance of encountering any one, afforded attractive exchange.

Kate Ireton involuntarily lingered in the precincts that had so long been home-ground to her. The afternoon had melted into one of those delicious balmy evenings, when a dewy freshness mingles with the soft golden light that rests upon turf and tree, blending all into one shining haze of beauty and repose.

The deer lifted their graceful heads from amid the fern, to note the passing figure; watching her shyly with their large lustrous eyes, yet scarcely pausing in their lazy ruminant chewings. There was stillness in the air, unbroken, save by the lowing of the distant herds, or the querulous fold-ward note of the flocks, or the liquid whistle of a blackbird that sang his flute-like hymn of farewell to parting day, from a neighbouring copse. All things were blandly lapped in a peaceful calm, a tranquil rest. It seemed the fitting close to her past existence—her life of prosperous enjoyment, of undisturbed content, of unalloyed happiness. She turned to look for the last time upon the old Hall, its picturesque gables, and oddly-angled roof; its clock-house, offices and stables; its glittering vane and white dove-cot: its green clustered door-ways, and trellised walls, shone roseate-touched and gilded; while its many windows—one for each day in the year, after the fashion of some old English mansions—sparkled resplendent in the reflected glory of the western light. The sun shed its full departing radiance upon the scene of her departed joys.

With a swelling heart, Kate resumed her way. As she came to the sheltered lane, forming the boundary enclosure on that side of the demesne, she paused, and leaned upon the stile beneath the nut boughs. A half-sad, half-tender expression came into her face, as she remembered how she had once leaned upon this stile—when she was compelled to stand upon its step, to rest her arms upon the top—and how she had looked down into the lane, where sat a boy on horseback, with handsome eyes and grave smile, and penetrating voice, and striking foreign dress, and still more striking figure and noble air, looking up at her, and talking to her in that strain of quiet, involuntary, conscious superiority, which her spirit had never since been able to deny, though ever since engaged in attempting to resist. Against the appeal which the eyes, the smile, the voice, the air, made to her senses and imagination, Kate even yet resolutely and steadfastly set herself to withstand; and she murmured, “It shall not be—it *must not* be; now, less than ever!”

But against the influence of that inwardly acknowledged superiority, her heart, her mind, her sense, her better feeling—better feeling born of suffering and sorrow—did not now endeavour to steel themselves. In this sacredly-still moment—when alone with her own soul, and standing, as it were, on the confines of a past period, and on the brink of a future one—Kate Ireton allowed her spirit to admit the full superiority of him she singled out from the rest of mankind. She permitted herself to dwell upon that noble rectitude, that constancy of honour, that unswerving, unflinching, invincible regard for truth, and justice, and right, at which she had always outwardly scoffed, while most in secret revering. As she mused on all that had passed between herself and the Iron Cousin, since they had first met as children at that very spot, some of the Iron Cousin's right strength of character seemed to pass into her own, fortifying and invigorating its best points, curbing and controlling its waywardness and impetuosity, steadying and rendering consistent its worthiest impulses. Her eye chancing to fall on the iron clasp of the bracelet, which never quitted her arm, she thought of all Fermor's frequent patience with her, his untiring forbearance, his unflinching temper. She remembered how (at the very time she chose that clasp—when by petulant speech, and fleering taunt, and harsh, galling, insolent-sounding words, she had sought to conceal the sentiment which prompted the choice of its material) he had borne with her ungraciousness, had silently, patiently, and unreproachfully submitted to it, even while showing by the firm-set lip, and grave shade of countenance, how deeply it hurt him. There was always something in the quiet dignity of Fermor's tacit reproof which impressed and haunted Kate, long after she had succeeded in apparently throwing off its effect.

Then came into her mind what he had subsequently said, when her rudeness and bluntness to her guest had forced rebuke from him; yet, even then, as it seemed, chiefly impelled by regard for her character, and regret to see her behave unworthily.

“ Yet—‘ not pleasant to live with ! ’ ’Twas bitter ! ”

She buried her face in her hands, as if to hide the hot blushes that burnt upon her cheek, while recalling those words; and as if she would shut out the look, the tone, which accompanied them—serious, yet deeply grieved; severe, but more profoundly pained.

“He must despise me—utterly disapprove and disregard me,” she thought, in her bitterness of heart. “Did he not leave us? Did he not withdraw from the society of one whose qualities he could not like, and would not vainly try to amend? But, be it so; since this reverse of fortune has chanced, I am content it should be thus. If—this place my home, this fair spot the same as mine own—I would not have had him dream I held other thoughts than those I seemed to entertain, still less now shall he guess that ever——” Even in self-communion she would not let the secret take shape and substance, but went rapidly on to another idea. “What was it else he said? That ‘Kate might be anything she wills to be.’ If I were to set that sentence before me, as my guiding-star henceforth—if I were to make its import my rule, its purpose my aim—it were a noble ambition! One worthy the Iron Cousin’s worthless cousin! Yet, once he said she was ‘not worthless;’ nay, ‘was well worth any pains.’” And one of her old smiles gleamed in Kate’s eyes as she found herself recalling so many of his words, and perceived how vividly they dwelt in her memory, especially where the words seemed to betoken regard. Yet as she smiled, she coloured. This craving to possess Fermor’s esteem and liking, yet sensitively shrinking from its evidence, was one of Kate’s peculiar characteristics.

“Let me remember one more of the Iron Cousin’s sentences,” pursued she, “which shall help me to put in force the other. ‘Distasteful things done for conscience sake become remembered pleasures.’ I am unwilling to leave this spot; I am reluctant to break up this train of thought; but I am conscious that I ought to do both, bravely and resolutely, if Kate would commence her ‘willing to be what she ought to be.’ No more lingering, therefore; no more musing. Life must be a sturdy, active, onward

progress with me now. Let me take my way at once; this stile, my first obstacle overcome; the bowery lane, my first limit crossed; that footpath, my appointed course; the shining river yonder, a bright guiding line; and my village home with dear old Mattykin, a goal and refuge."

Kate Ireton entered the cottage porch, and lifted the latch; the door, like those of many country dwellings, usually standing open, or, if closed, unfastened. She found no one in the little parlour, which was plain in the extreme, but neat and clean to precision. The house was in perfect silence; no one seemed within.

Kate went to the latticed casement at the side of the room, which looked on the stony yard or play-ground of the adjoining school-house, and she could hear the hum of children's busy voices through the open windows opposite. There was but one other room on the ground-floor of the cottage—a kitchen, clean and neat as the parlour, with a kettle singing on the hob, and tea-things ready laid on the snow-white dresser. A small staircase, so steep and narrow as to be like that of a ship's cabin—led to the bed-rooms above. Kate went softly up, and found Matty propped amid pillows, diligently knitting.

"Mattykin!"

"My darling Miss Kate! My own dear, darling child! Come her own sweet self to see her poor old nurse, since she can't crawl to her!"

"My poor Mattykin, I have only just learned your state; and here have I been accusing you in my heart of unkindness, and unrelentingness, and I know not what cruel, unjust things, for not coming to see your naughty, spoiled child, and forgiving her in her trouble, and all the while you could not move! But this is not the only injustice I have to ask pardon for; I was harsh, imperious, and shamefully ungrateful to you, in forgetting, at the moment you vexed me, all you had done for me, and had been

to me, and suffering you to go away without 'kissing, and making it up,' as we used, when I was a fractious, wilful child. However, dear Matty, I cannot better prove my sincere repentance, and my sense of your greater goodness and indulgence, than by coming to you in my sorrow and poverty. I am come to ask you for a home, Matty; I am come to ask you to be a mother to your poor orphan girl; I am come to be a dutiful, loving child to you, if you will let me—if you will have me."

"My dear, dear Miss Kate! my own generous-hearted darling! Just one of your kind, clever thoughts, how you might best please your old Mattykin."

Then they fell into softer, graver talk, while they spoke of him they had lost—the kind master—the loving uncle: and then, after a pause, Kate made Matty tell her of Ruth Field, of her goodness, her gentleness, her simple, quiet, virtuous ways.

"In short, she's as pious and still as a quakeress, yet as active and useful as a penny-postman or a milk-maid," said Matty, in conclusion. "Hark! I hear the latch. That must be she. School's over by this time, and then Ruth comes home to tea; and a pleasant, cheerful, cosy meal she makes of it, for us two."

"For us three, I hope, now!" said Kate. "I'll go down and meet her, and ask her to let me be one of your snug little household in future."

"A strange lady!" exclaimed Ruth, in her subdued but earnest voice, as she saw the vision of beautiful Kate Ireton descending the staircase, and coming straight into the bright, rural kitchen.

"A stranger to you, Ruth; but you are no stranger to me. I have heard so many delightful things of you, that I seem to know you quite well, quite intimately. I hope you will let me be much more intimate, that you will let me live with you; that you will take me into this pleasant cottage of yours, and let me share your home and your kindness with my Matty."

"You are Miss Ireton!" said Ruth, with a look full of genuine, irrepressible admiration

"Yes; that is—I am Kate Ireton to you, as you are Ruth Field to me. Shall it not be so?"

The two young girls clasped hands with a silent warmth that spoke their several sincere, direct, ingenuous natures.

"And now, dear Ruth, to show me that I may at once consider myself at home, let me untie your bonnet, and take your shawl, and see you sit down in that chair, while I make tea, and get all ready to carry up to Matty, as I hear you so kindly do every day. What a tea-party she will have this evening!"

"But I cannot let you do all this," said Ruth, as Kate with housewifely alacrity, bustled to and fro in her preparations for the meal, after placing Ruth comfortably in a seat, and chatting cheerfully the while, about the neatness and order of her pretty cottage-kitchen.

"Why not? Do you know, I'm terribly accustomed to do as I like; and I like to see you resting there after your long day's toil among that rabble of school-children, which, I'm sure, must be enough to weary out the stoutest spirits. And I like to wait upon you, and feel that I can make myself useful; you don't know what a luxury that is to one who has led an idle young-lady life. And I like immensely to find myself once more doing something to please my Mattykin, in return for all her goodness and devotion to me. And now, I'm sure you would not wish to thwart me in all these likings of mine, would you, Ruth?"

Ruth smiled—her own soft, quiet smile. She, like all the rest, was beginning to feel the influence of Kate Ireton's fascination.

While Kate, as she looked at Ruth, found herself thinking:—"He was right; the expression of her face is 'positively beautiful.' And now, if you approve, we'll join Matty," she added aloud. "Here, Ruth, you carry the loaf and the butter, and I'll carry the tea-tray."

"Carry it end-ways, or you'll not manage to get it up the staircase," answered Ruth's mild voice.

"Now Matty, you are going to do the honours of the table,

while I pour out the tea, and cut the bread and butter; and Ruth is to sit there and be quiet, while we talk and amuse her; she must be content to give up playing the mistress of the house, or mistress at all, after school-hours; quiet and rest are better than dignity, when all day's been spent ruling an unruly herd."

"Ruth says they're not so very unruly, poor things! Children will be children, after all," said Matty. "To be sure, she makes the best of everything; even noisy little torments she makes out to be not so bad, if they're reasoned with, and talked to."

"The most troublesome child may be made more docile by patience," said Ruth; "the most giddy, the most mischievous, the most sulky, the most obstinate may be taught better, if you have but sufficient patience. The only thing with children, is never to lose your patience or your temper."

"Very difficult to preserve either, in dealing with them, when they are really troublesome," said Kate.

"Not so much so as you might imagine, perhaps," said Ruth. "The thought that they are ignorant, that they err more from this than from wilful misbehaviour, that you have to forgive them seven times in a day, if seven times in a day they repent, and to forgive them, chiefly, for that they know not what they do, will be a sufficient guard upon yourself; and once children find you capable of self control, they insensibly learn to curb themselves."

"The most formidable things you must have to contend with, Ruth, are the perpetual din and clamour of tongues, the close confinement, and the want of fresh air," said Kate.

"It is curious how you may become accustomed to the most unpleasant things, by patience, by habit, and by comparing them with still worse," answered Ruth. "The recollection that the noise of a factory,—the buzz of wheels and machinery,—is worse than the hum of young voices: the thought that many innocent persons have been pent in narrow dungeons for years; the remembrance that hundreds of people of their own will, undergo a nightly stifling in the foul, noisome air of a gas-lighted theatre, or crowded assembly, render tolerable these few hours a day shut

up in a school-room. Besides, I am only too glad to have them I wished for the situation particularly, as one I could fill, and one which would give me the means of earning an honest livelihood."

A thought darted into the mind of Kate Ireton.

"I have heard a report that the office of monitress is vacant. Is it so?"

"Yes; it has been unfilled these last ten days; I have discharged the duties as well as I can, meantime; but I hear there will be some difficulty in supplying Mrs. Burgess's place, although she did not satisfy the majority of the Directors. Dr. Meadows was at the head of those who objected to her, and was eventually the means of her being discharged."

"Then Dr. Meadows is one of the board of Directors?"

"Yes, the chief,—the most actively influential among them."

"It would be an admirable means of carrying out my project of independence!" was Kate's inward reflection. "Yet, the noise, the constraint, the toilsome work,—above all, that 'poor smell!' Hateful points knowingly to encounter. But then, are not 'distasteful things, undertaken for conscience sake, remembered pleasures?' And would it not be a pleasure to me, to secure this independent course, wherein to 'will' Kate into being something better than she has been?"

"You know Dr. Meadows, do you not?" Ruth said.

"Yes, he is one of my best, my kindest, friends; I am going to call upon him the first thing to-morrow morning, to consult with him upon my future plans."

"By the bye," said Matty, suddenly, "how will you manage, Miss Kate, my darling, for want of proper dress? Mourning, I know, requires little change still you must have——"

"I shall do very well, dear, thoughtful Mattykin; my wardrobe, such as it is—for I mean to be a mirror of economy—is to be here to night. That good fellow, Ben Dimble, promised to bring it for me. He it was, who told me so many things of you, that made me know and love you, Ruth," she added looking at her as she spoke.

She saw the pale face change colour. She saw a tint like a

blush-rose steal over the mild, pensive features. The bent head, the gentle expression, the soft hue, brought to her mind the thought 'Yes, he was right; it is like one of Raffaele's sainted heads.'

A moment after Kate heard the latch lifted, and a man's step upon the threshold. Exclaiming: "That's Ben!" she ran down stairs to receive him, and thank him.

After he had brought in the trunk, and had placed it for her in a little nook she pointed out to him, where it might not be in the way, Kate saw Ben cast a wistful, lingering look around, while preparing to go.

"Do not be in a hurry, Ben; I dare say Ruth will be down in a moment."

"I don't think she will, Miss Kate," answered he, with a sort of sigh, as he turned his hat round and round in his hands. "No so long as I'm here. I never see her but chance-wise. She never comes where I am, knowingly; it hurts her kind heart, to see one that she can't feel towards, as he feels to her. I'm used to it now. But perhaps, Miss Kate,"—and he brightened,—“you'll like to hear how White Bess and Chestnut Phillis are going on, from time to time; and then I might happen to——”

"Yes, Ben, yes; I shall very much wish to have news of them. Therefore mind you bring me word, the first time you can get away, and come over here."

"Thank ye kindly,—kindly,—Miss Kate."

And Ben was gone.

CHAPTER XL.

NEXT morning, Kate Ireton was up with the lark. She commenced her new existence with an energy and impulse natural to her character, enhanced by her present purpose, and encouraged as a helm to sustain the weight that sat at her heart for her un-

ele's loss. It lay there, heavy, and dull, and sad ; but deep and sacred—a regret apart—not to be allowed to rise and overwhelm hopefuller thoughts and aims, which might render her worthy one day to rejoin him.

She had always been an early riser ; and now she rejoiced in a habit which gave her so main an advantage in her future life of diligence and self-dependence.

She felt an almost childlike glee in finding herself so much beforehand with Ruth Field, who had not yet come down, although it was the hour for breakfast.

But when time still went on, and Kate knew that school-hour would arrive in another forty minutes, she resolved to go into Ruth's room and call her.

She tapped softly, and went in. The young girl lay buried in a profound sleep. The lameness, and defective figure, were hidden by the recumbent attitude : only the fair head—with its light brown hair escaped from the muslin cap, and the cheek slightly flushed with slumber—was visible ; and again Kate Ireton was struck with the soft, resigned, Raffaellesque expression. For the sake of him who had said this, Kate could not refrain from bending down, and gently kissing the delicate cheek.

Kate had never had any companion-friend of her own sex and age ; and her heart warmed to this good, gentle girl, whose simple worth, and sincerity of character and manner, peculiarly attracted her.

At the caressing touch, Ruth awoke.

"I was dreaming of mother," she said ; "I thought she was near me, and kissed me." Then recollecting herself, as her eyes fell upon Kate Ireton, she started up, saying : "I have overslept myself ; I fear it is very late. You have been unhelped, unattended to. How could I have so missed the hour. But I could not get to sleep last night, in the excitement of seeing you,—of your coming ; and this morning, when I should have been up. I— Forgive me, pray. I cannot forgive myself."

"But you must forgive yourself, or I shall not forgive you, and there is really nothing to be forgiven," said Kate, playfully.

"Do you know, I am delighted to have had this few hours' gain upon you; it makes me feel so virtuous, to have been earlier up than the school-mistress herself! Let me fasten this button for you. And now, come down as soon as you please; you will find breakfast quite ready for us two below. Matty has had hers, a quarter of an hour since."

When Ruth entered the little parlour, Kate's eyes sparkled to see the look of admiring surprise she threw around.

"Why, you have transformed the place into a fairy-queen's bower! How can you have done all this? In so short a time, too! It is like magic! Aladdin's palace! You must have had invisible hands to help you. How could you manage it?"

"By getting up at dawn, and, as you say, by having elvish aid. The little good-folk,—the fays,—the fairies,—have been here. That arch-sprite, Puck, for once, did no mischief; instead of skimming the milk of its cream, he put it in the jug for me, and filled the kettle with fresh water from the well, and lighted the fire, and set the tea-cups and saucers, and in short, made good his title to his other name, of Robin Goodfellow, doing all the scullionry in the kitchen, while Titania and I decked the parlour. Oberon, on this occasion, gave up his forester-sport with the 'morning's love,' Cephalus, and brought in boughs for us, you see."

The cottage-parlour was indeed turned into an elegant room. The latticed casement was snowily draped with a long white muslin scarf, fastened in the centre, and drawn on either side. Green branches, from the few shrubs and trees that skirted the stony play-ground, were placed on the mantel-shelf, drooping gracefully from the three or four glasses which the cottage afforded; while others were arranged, with shorter stalks, in a couple of deep plates, upon the white breakfast-cloth. On the small deal side-table was spread an Indian-patterned shawl-kerchief as a cover; and on this were ranged Kate's books, rich in morocco covers, and gilded binding, and all the munificence of ornament that affection loves to lavish upon gift-volumes. Among these, lay the Florentine ivory carved riding-whip; and over all, was hung the Italian sketch.

Ruth's eyes could not cease from drinking in all these objects which seemed to convert the cottage room into a home-temple. They brought a light, an atmosphere of taste, and artistic grace, and elevating refinement into the dwelling, yet without marring its own neat and simple charm.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" was all Ruth Field could repeat.

"Dear Ruth, if you could only know the ecstasy it gives me to see your innocent pleasure, you would understand how delightfully you fulfil the promise my imagination made me while I was busied with this. But we must not forget how time flies, while we are enjoying ourselves. Look here!" And she smilingly held her watch before Ruth's eyes.

"School-hour! And no breakfast-table cleared; and no dinner prepared! Nothing done, nothing thought of!" And Ruth clasped her hands, in desperate self-blame.

"It shall be attended to. You go to your school duties. Leave all to me. Remember I am housekeeper now. Self-elected; and, therefore, despotic, irresponsible, not to be appealed from."

"But I cannot have you do all this—this drudgery," said Ruth, as Kate alertly set about carrying the breakfast things from the room, and began to wash them up, in the little kitchen.

"My dear Ruth, don't be a ceremonious simpleton, but be gone to your teaching, and leave me to do as I like. You forget that this is all play-work to me, like doll's house-keeping, or acting a comedy of housewifery. It has all the charm of novelty and holiday sport, with the dear delight of fancying myself useful."

"But it will be so strange—so unaccustomed—you will not know what to do."

"Don't make me out quite such an awkward ignoramus. Besides, if I should be at a loss, haven't I Matty to apply to? She'll tell me all about marketing, all about cookery. Go, go! and when you come back, you shall find dinner ready, with some 'savoury mess' prepared, that only 'the neat-handed Phillis,' or your new housekeeper, Kate Ireton, could possibly have achieved."

When Kate's household duties were all performed, she ran up and bade Matty goodbye for an hour or two, that she might pay her visit to the vicarage.

She found good Dr. Meadows in his study, preparing his next Sunday's discourse. But he put away his writing, and gave her his clear thought and undivided attention.

She entreated his assistance in her plan of future industry and self-reliance; and mentioned the situation of monitress as one which afforded precisely the opportunity she sought of earning a competence for herself and Matty.

"The salary, added to the sum I may reckon upon through Mr. Weldon's kind provision, will amply suffice for our joint wants," she said; "and I shall then have the hope that our living with Ruth Field will be a mutual advantage. I hear that in you, dear sir, lies the chief power to bestow this situation. You will not refuse to give me your support, and induce the other gentlemen to confirm your nomination!"

"My dear girl, if it rested with me, be assured you should not have long to plead. Both for the school-children's sake, and in furtherance of your own worthy project, I could not hesitate a moment—I could not wish better. But there are many things to be considered. A canvass is indispensable. There will be the expense of cards, the fatigue—the disagreeable of personal application, of suing for votes, and for influence. Not only have the whole Board of Directors to be applied to, but the suffrages of the parishioners have to be obtained. I greatly fear—I do not think, that——"

"The necessary expenses can be defrayed by disposing of my watch, if requisite," interrupted Kate, eagerly; "and as for fatigue and disagreeable, I am prepared to encounter those."

"Nay, nay," smiled the vicar; "for the watch, you must not part with that; you will find it too useful, too necessary, in your school-life. The cards shall be my care; they shall be my contribution to your endeavour. But the other point offers a far more formidable obstacle. You have the name—forgive me, my dear!—of being a young lady of some—some—in short, of having

a high spirit of your own. And that is not exactly the thing to go canvassing with."

"Why not? Where's the use of high spirit but to carry us through difficulties? It will enable me to face them; it will be a spur, a stimulus, a support to me."

"Ay, a spur, a stimulus; but, I fear, not a support. A spur serves to urge you on; a stimulus excites, but does not strengthen. Beware of trusting to such false forces. You may commence with good courage; but it may droop; when you find you have to encounter cold looks, cool treatment, lukewarm words; it may fail you, beneath delay, disappointment, heart-weariness. My poor child! it wants something more than high spirit to carry through a project of this kind, however well it may do to begin with."

"But this, well borne in mind, shall keep my spirit up—firm and faithful, strong and constant. Never fear, dear sir; with these timely hints from you, I shall win through with my purpose. I thank you truly for them; and I shall hope to ask you for congratulation upon the success which will be greatly owing to them."

"Well, I know not why I should farther seek to damp your enthusiasm of energy. Only beware, my dear girl; do not lose courage when you lose ground; do not think the case hopeless when it seems past hope; but, above all do not be cast down and despondent, should you at last fail."

"No; then I will gather fresh courage for another attempt," said Kate. "It will be only beginning anew; trying for something else, instead of for this. But, meantime, dear doctor, give me the necessary paper—the testimonial—whatever form of written application I ought to be furnished with."

Smiling at the young girl's characteristic impetuosity, the good vicar drew up the requisite document, and said, as he placed it in her hands: "You may call at Chalkby's, in your way, if you please, and tell him I will call round myself this afternoon, and speak to him about the cards he will have to print. He is one of the voters, and will furnish you with a list of the rest, and

the names of the Directors ; so you can commence business at once. But, before you go, you must see Mrs. Meadows. You will find her up stairs, giving the chicks their early dinner."

Kate felt that she would have preferred losing no time in setting about the matter which occupied her whole thoughts ; but she checked herself, remembering, with an inward smile, that here was an occasion for taking her first lesson in self-control and mental discipline, by compelling herself to chat and laugh with the children, and listen to them, and enter into all their important sayings and doings, while her mind was full of something else.

Kate Ireton's way of lending herself to the interest and eagerness of the little Meadows tribe, had made her a great favourite ; and when she opened the door where they now were, there was a simultaneous rush from the dinner-table, as they all thronged round her, shouting, " Kaytighton ! Kaytighton ! " that being her nursery-name among them.

Little Harry Meadows, the 'Squire's godson, at once established himself on her knee ; and, while his mother talked to her, perpetually essayed to draw her attention exclusively to himself, by pulling her face down, with extremely sticky, pudding-immersed fingers applied to her chin, and insinuating themselves round her throat.

" Kaytighton ! I say, Kaytighton ! I want you to listen to me. Do have some of this nice pudding ; it is to be our last red currant pudding this year ; and see what a nice thick crust it has ! The walls of Troy we call it. Look, this is the flaming-red city, and here are all the crushed and smothered Trojans, poor wretches ! "

" How cruelly your spoon plays the battering ram among them ! and what a ruthless Achilles you are yourself, Harry ! But where's the great wooden horse ? I don't see him anywhere." answered Kate.

" Oh, he's burnt up ! Gone ! Not even his mane, or his tail, or a hoof of him left ! "

Kate Ireton threw herself so entirely into little Harry's " make-believe "—and children are never more enchanted than

when grown people will help them to make a romance or a drama out of ordinary facts and realities—that he could hardly bear to let her go, when, at length, she talked of taking leave.

“I haven’t had such a happy time, Kaytighton, since last that kind, good-natured Mr. Worthington was here. When he set me on his knee, and made me repeat my name—‘Harry Heathcote Meadows;’ and lent me his pencil—his grand, gold pencil-case—and let me have it in my own hands to write dogs and horses, and Greeks and Trojans, with. But I like Kaytighton better even than him.”

“Then you’re a silly goose!” said Kate, stooping her face amid the boy’s curly locks; “for he’s much better than Kaytighton—he has a gold pencil-case to lend you, and she has none.”

“Ah, but for all that, I love Kaytighton the best. She lets me look at her watch—inside, all those curious works—if I take care not to breathe into it; and to see the little steel bar wagging backwards and forwards—oh! so quick! And to hear it say its little ticking time-count; and to see it spring open at the back—though she won’t let me find out how she does it. But some day—if I’m very good—to day—oh! to-day, Kaytighton! won’t you?”

“No, not to-day; for I mustn’t stay longer. But next time I come, I’ll show you how to make the watch-back fly open, your own self, Harry.”

“Oh! you dear darling Kaytighton! But mind you come very soon, then—very soon!”

“Very, very soon, Harry. I’ll be sure to remember.”

Had all Kate Ireton’s canvassing been as little irksome as it was at Mr. Chalkby’s, she would have had no cause to complain. He was civil and respectful as ever—nay, perhaps more so—showing, by a certain shy and hesitating kindness, that he sympathized with her altered fortunes, yet feared to express the feeling lest he might seem to remind her of them. Modest Lucy Chalk

by stood by, blushing and trembling, and scarcely daring to look at Kate through brimming eyes, from dread that she should appear curious, or impertinent, or intrusive—or anything most impossible for her to be.

But with others, the case was far different. In going the round of the parishioners, to solicit their votes, how often was she reminded of Coriolanus. "The people must have their voices; neither will they bate one jot of ceremony." They seemed to take a pleasure in forcing her to go through all the form and minutiae of asking, as if repeating to themselves, "She's to make 'her' requests by particulars, wherein every one of us has a single honour, in giving 'her' our own voices with our own tongues." How often, on presenting herself, was she tempted briefly to say with the haughty Roman patrician, "You know the cause, sir, of my standing here." How often, when some low-lived vulgarian, delighting to parade his power, dallied with her impatience, and kept her in suspense as to his decision, did she long to put an end to the deliberation, by "I will make much of your voices, and so trouble you no farther." Once, she had nearly startled a dirty publican and a smudgy blacksmith, with uttering aloud what she muttered to herself, "Bid them wash their faces, and keep their teeth clean." Sometimes, in thorough vexation of heart, she would be ready to exclaim, "Rather than fool it so, let the high office and the honour go;" but then her pledge to Dr. Meadows, and her own spirit of determination, made her recall the thought and she would conclude with a smile at herself, "I am half through; the one part suffer'd, the rest will I do."

She had read the scene over, partly with a touch of self-mockery and self-tormenting; partly in the idea of nerving herself to go on with her task to the end, by the aid of poetry, and fancy, and uncommonplace, brought amidst the common-places she had to encounter.

With the view of confronting the major difficulty first, she had made it her earliest duty to call upon the Director from whom she expected the most strenuous opposition. It was the patron and upholder of "Lemon-face."

Mrs. Burgess had been his housekeeper; and he, getting tired of her crabbed, domineering ways, had hit upon this method of pensioning her off, by obtaining the situation of monitress in the village school for her.

He was a low-bred man, immensely rich, and an inveterate miser; the same Mr. Scrimpum against whom Kate Ireton entertained an old grudge, for having refused to contribute to a charitable project of her uncle and Dr. Meadows. She had never seen him; but what she had heard, made her particularly dread going. However, there was no help for it, and she went.

She was shown into a parlour, dark and grimy, notwithstanding its fine carpet, fine curtains, large mirrors, and massive mahogany furniture. As she entered, a voice called out, "Rub your shoes on the mat, young 'oman, afore you come out o' the hall. No need to bring cakes o' mud and dust into the parlour, soiling the Brussels carpet."

She saw a snub-nosed little old man, seated in a low-backed, shiny, comfortless-looking horse-hair chair, glaring at her through a pair of green spectacles.

"There, sit down, sit down, young 'oman; you may sit down. It's as cheap sittin' as standin', the sayin' is. Now, come, let's hear what you've got to say. The old story, I 'spose. A beggin' letter, or a beggin' somethin', o' course. A man can't be said to be worth a bit o' money, but what he's sure to be a mark for all the beggars twenty miles round."

"I am no beggar; I merely came to request——" began Kate.

"O' course you did, I know'd you did. What's requestin' but askin'; what's askin' but beggin', I should like to know?"

"To request," Kate went on firmly, "that you will give——"

"To be sure—*give*; that's it, o' course. The way with 'em all! the way with 'em all!"

"Will give your name and sanction to my proposal of

becoming head monitress at the National Village School," said Kate.

"Hang me if I do!" exclaimed the old man, irritably. "They marched off my 'oman from the sitooation, without so much as with your leave, or by your leave; and hang me if their 'oman—their candidate—shall succeed in her room! I'll give 'em trouble enough, I promise 'em; hang me if I won't!"

"I trust you will come to no such premature Tyburn fate, sir," said Kate Ireton; "yet I hope, nevertheless, you will revoke your sentence on my behalf. I will promise never to be the means of putting a cord round your neck, on the clause that affects you, if you will consent to think better of the part that concerns me."

"Upon my credit, you're a strange young 'oman, you are! Is that the way you think to come round a man? I'll tell you what I'll do with you. If you'll pass me your word that, whenever Betsy Burgess can get up her character agin, and by hook or by crook, contrive to come back to the sitooation, you'll give it up to her—by jingo! I don't mind if I promise to let you have it in the meantime."

"I cannot accept your promise on such a condition; it would not be right. I cannot pass my word to give up in favour of one who is obnoxious—who is proved unfit for the office you would have her fill."

"No, no, says you; you'll not do anything I ask you, but I must grant whatever you choose to request of me. By jingo! that's a nice way of reckoning, that is!"

"Ask me anything I can do, and I will do it; but that which I feel and know to be wrong, I cannot, will not do," answered Kate.

"Oh, I dare say! Now, I warrant me, you'd make me believe that you'd clip off them 'ere fine locks o' yours, if I was to ask you."

Kate Ireton had very magnificent hair, which she wore in a profusion of rich, thick, shining curls, that fell on either side of her beautiful face.

"Send for a pair of scissors, and I will soon show you that anything which depends on myself—no sacrifice of principle, but a mere personal sacrifice—I will do to oblige you, and gain the situation I so much desire."

The old man rang the bell, and when the scissors were brought, he grinned as he saw her take them, and deliberately prepare to cut off the luxuriant treasure.

"Let 'em alone!" he suddenly cried out. "Let 'em be, I tell you! I won't have one on 'em touched. They're much too good to be sheared away like a sheep's fleece. But tuck 'em away; tuck 'em behind your ears, my good girl. Just you take my word for it; if you wear them fine flopperty curls when you're a school-missus, you'll get into disfavour with the Inspectresses and Lady Directresses. Such ringlets as them looks too free and independent. They look as though you knowed yourself to be a lady, and had a right to dress your hair like one. Depend on't, they'll bring you ill-will from the women, and mayhap too much good-will from the men; and that'll double the ill-will. Matrons and spouses, and mothers o' families—let alone young misses and sweethearts—'ll think it their bounden duty to set their faces agin such curls in a village teacher. Tuck 'em up! tuck 'em up, I say!"

Kate laughingly did as the old man bade her, while he goggled through his green spectacles, and grinned through his great yellow teeth at her, with ogreish satisfaction the while.

"Glad to see one 'oman, at least, knows how to mind what's said to her. You mark my words; if you mean to be a school-missus, keep them curls o' yourn out o' sight."

"Very well; I do mean to be a school-mistress, and you mean me to be one—the one, evidently, Mr. Scrimpum. Here's the paper. Be so kind as to sign your name to it."

"Ah, yes; that's the way you come round me. But somehow, it isn't altogether unpleasant to be come round by you. Some women have a knack of gettin' the better of a man, without his much mindin' on it. Well, give us hold o' your paper. At any rate, it ain't a beggin' letter. No money wanted; only scratch o' the pen."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE rest of those who formed the Board of Directors proved to be gentlemen; sensible, urbane, and considerate. Many of them were friends and hunting-associates of her uncle; and expressed themselves as feeling only too fortunate in securing the services of one who, from her superior education and advantages, was so more than competent to fulfil the office in question.

Some of the county ladies, with Mrs. Huntley at their head, —who had in former times occasionally smarted from Kate Iretton's little conciliatory manner, yet endured it for the sake of her rank and station,—now took their revenge by obligingly compassionate remarks upon her fallen condition, and gossiping comments upon her present undertaking.

"Those vastly proud young ladies have the strangest notions of what is proper and decorous!" observed Mrs. Huntley, to one of her morning visitors. "It is scarcely delicate,—indeed, hardly decent,—to settle down in so mean a capacity, in the very neighbourhood where she has been known in respectability and luxury, and an honourable position. But really, these high-spirited, independent damsels don't seem to understand what delicacy and decency mean,—still less, true dignity! I think, the least she could have done, was to have taken herself and her poverty and disgrace out of the way of those who had formerly been acquainted with her, when she was a person one might bow to, and be on visiting terms with. I shouldn't wonder if she were to have the effrontery still to bow, if we were to meet; but I should take care to put her in her proper place at once. Nothing like deciding these uncomfortable kind of altered positions at first. It saves a vast deal of after-disagreeable."

"Oh, as to bowing, I don't think she'll do that," answered the visitor. "I passed her yesterday, in my carriage, and she had the assurance to cut me,—absolutely to cut me; though, perhaps, I might have nodded kindly to her, if she had given me the

opportunity. But it's best as it is; she may be quite certain, I shall never take the slightest notice of her in future."

Unconscious of these and similar animadversions, Kate Ireton pursued her own self-appointed course. She was duly elected, and regularly established as head monitress of the village school, and she set herself assiduously to work in the discharge of its duties. Neither did she slacken in her active superintendence of the cottage household; enhancing its comforts, and bringing grace and refinement, in addition to its primitive simplicity. She made it a happy home to Matty and Ruth. To the latter, her advent was a benignant chance, a blest occurrence of fortune; as though some good genius had alighted within the sphere of her daily existence. Kate's presence acted as a spell to draw her from her depression; it cheered and gladdened her; some of the reflected brightness and spirit of Kate's character shone upon and enlivened the gentle diffidence and touching passiveness of Ruth Field. Her face became less wan, her step less feeble, her air less listless and sad. It was Kate's delight to watch these symptoms of returning physical and moral health; and she pleased herself with fostering and promoting them. She spared Ruth all the fatigue she could. She made her quit school early, and lie late; frequently insisting that she should take her breakfast before she left her room,—bringing it up herself, with so irresistible an affectionate ministry, that Ruth was compelled to yield, however inclined to remonstrate.

"I cannot bear to see you waiting upon me thus; you, so indulged, so refinedly brought up, so accustomed to be attended upon yourself!" she would say.

"Do you not see, that 'tis but another kind of indulgence, Ruthy? Indulging myself by indulging another, instead of others indulging me? Depend on't, there's a subtle pleasure in this voluntary giving pleasure, instead of tame receiving pleasure, peculiarly suited to my self-willed ladyship. I give you the minor share, in making you the recipient, and myself the conferrer. Therefore you see you are, in fact, obliging me, by submitting to be obliged and waited upon; indulging me, by letting yourself be indulged."

This reversal of her own former spoiling, gave Kate exquisite gratification. She took singular pains to humour and pet her old nurse; encouraging her in all sorts of whimsies; letting her treat her imperiously, and speak to her authoritatively. She had an especial amusement in giving way to her frequent peevishness, and querulous complaints; would address herself to their patient hearing, and to the serious adjustment of their multifarious branches of grievance.

With the school-children, she soon became immensely popular. She accommodated herself to their dispositions, studied their tempers, watched their faults, learned their good qualities. She never thwarted; but she enforced obedience. She made herself beloved; but she acquired their respect. She encouraged and praised; but she had perfect command. The mere lifting of her finger sufficed, not more from acknowledged right of sway than from personal attachment. They one and all loved their new school mistress, as well as revered her.

Kate Ireton possessed many characteristics that are peculiarly winning to children. She was sprightly, sweet-tempered, playful-mannered, with a most musical speaking-voice, and an extremely handsome face and person. Children are more impressed by beauty, than is sometimes believed. Their fresh imaginations, their susceptible senses, are keenly alive to the allurements of personal attraction. An infant will more readily go to a stranger who is good-looking, than to one who is plain. A child will sooner make friends with a person possessing a comely set of features, than an ugly countenance,—unless there be some charm of expression that countervails the effect of homely lineaments.

There was one dreamy-looking, shy child among her pupils, whose large dark eyes Kate frequently found wistfully fixed upon her.

“Why do you look at me so much, Peggy? Come here, dear, and tell me.”

The child got very red; but answered in a quiet way: “Bo-

cause I can't help it. Your face is very pleasant to look at. Besides, it makes me remember ; and I like to remember."

"To remember?"

"Yes, I like to remember, better than anything. I like to remember the time when father was alive, and I used to take his dinner out to him in the hay-field, and sit on the hay, watching him while he ate it. And the time when he used to come home at evening, and ask for me, and set me on his knee, while he had his supper, and talk to me, and call me his little Peggy—his dear little Peggy."

"And what does my face make you remember?"

"It makes me remember the first time I saw it ; and it makes me remember another face, that was pleasanter still to look at,—more beautiful, even."

The child glanced timidly up at Kate, to see whether she was offended ; but finding her look pleased and interested, she went on, in her dreamy, wistful way : "That was a very, very beautiful face !"

"Your father's?"

"No ; the gentleman's."

"What gentleman?"

"The one who was with you, when I saw you first. I remember your coming here one morning—when I first came to school, after father died—with a tall, handsome gentleman. His was the most beautiful face I ever saw ; with its kind, grave eyes. And his voice, too—oh, his voice ! It made the tears come into my eyes, it was so grand and sweet at once, like our church-organ when it plays low. And he said 'my dear' to me, as gently as father used to say it, before he died. Nobody has ever called me 'my dear' in such a way, since I lost father, but him. I like to remember that voice ; I like to think about it. I hope I shall hear that voice again some day."

Kate drew a rosy-cheeked apple from her pocket, that her old nurse had given her that morning, and put it into the child's hand.

"Now, Peggy, we won't chat and dream any more, but we'll set to at the lesson with our best attention."

True to her purpose, Kate Ireton went on perseveringly. But there were times when she felt daunted, oppressed, dejected, by the change in her fate. She felt the want of sympathy; the unfailing interchange of mutual affection and mutual comprehension, to which she had ever been accustomed with her beloved uncle-father. She felt how different was the constant encouragement, the loving praise, the fond endearment, the perpetual incitement to do well, which existed then,—compared with the solitary self-resolve and self-reliance that was at present her sole stay. Now, she had nothing but her own inward consciousness of worthy intention to sustain her. It was chilling, and blank, contrasted with the former genial temperature of cherishing and kindness; yet withal, she tried to believe there might be something bracing and salutary in this colder moral atmosphere. In her most cheerless moments, she still strove to resist giving way to morbid feelings. She never yielded to exaggerated, unwholesome repinings. She ever sought to restrain despondency, by hopeful thoughts; to counteract regret by trust and confidence.

When she had been working hard all day at teaching, pent in the close school-room,—which, though ventilated, was oppressive with many breaths,—tired with dull, stupid, or negligent children, wearied with the ceaseless droning hum of voices, Kate would get out into the fresh air, wander away by herself into the fields, or by the river-side, and drink in new force of heart, and mind, and body. She would then feel that she had never till now duly savoured Nature in its great beneficence and beatitude. She had before *enjoyed* Nature; now she had learned to feel *grateful* for it. She inhaled its draughts of purity; she drew invigoration and refreshment from its free, open expanse; she revelled in its gracious, delicious influences; she steeped her senses in the exquisite sights, and sounds, and smells, that saluted them each in turn.

This river-side walk was a favourite one with Kate. On a week-day it was very retired; and it led so immediately from the outskirts of the village, whereon the school-house was situ-

ated, that it was of extremely convenient access, and formed almost a pleasure-ground, park, and garden to her who had been accustomed to all three. It was shrouded with low trees and copsewood for rather better than a quarter of a mile, and then led out across some pleasant meadow-land, in the direction of Heathcote Hall, Worthington Court, and, farther on, to the town of Dingleton. But Kate seldom strayed beyond the shaded path by the river-side. It was screened, secluded, and entirely to her taste.

One sunny afternoon she was going diligently through the allotted tasks, solacing herself with the prospect of an evening saunter in this sweet spot; but the hours lagged wearily, and seemed as though they would never come to a close.

Kate had brought Matty down stairs for the last week, during the afterpart of each day; the rheumatism having sufficiently yielded to the continued warm weather to admit of her sitting in the parlour, and even, for a short time, in the cottage-porch, while the afternoon sun shone full upon it.

The old nurse was basking here, pursuing her favourite occupation of knitting, when a figure appeared at the garden-gate, and threw a sudden dimness upon the glittering needles, that caused her to look up. At sight of Matty's face, the figure rapidly advanced; while she, shading her eyes with her hand, and perceiving who it was, exclaimed: "Mr. Fermor!"

Fermor Worthington greeted her kindly, warmly; but spoke in more of hurry than was usual with him. He told her he had only lately heard the tidings of the 'Squire's death, of the sale at Heathcote, of the unhappy events that had recently taken place; that he had just returned to England, and learned that her young mistress was living in the village with Ruth Field, at the cottage adjoining the school-house.

"And haven't you heard that she's head-monitress there?" said Matty.

"I heard the report, but could not credit it."

"Ay, but she is though; and she's teaching there at this very time. Afternoon-school is now going on; but she'll be home

to tea. You'll stop and see her, sir, and have tea with us, won't you?"

"I came to see her; I'll stay," said Fermor, who hardly knew what he was saying. He could not bear the thought of meeting Kate there, amid all that turmoil and crowd of school; yet, to abide here, waiting, was scarcely more tolerable.

Forcing himself to endure the suspense, he listened to the poor old nurse's lamentable account of her rheumatism, letting her ramble on, with little need of more than an occasional soothing or encouraging word from himself. He heard the history of her leaving the Hall, of the seizure which prevented her going back to her young lady in her trouble, of Ruth's goodness, of Kate's coming to live with them. It was the hope of hearing something of her—of how she had borne her great sorrow—that kept him thus quiescent.

"She's quite another thing now; quite herself again, as I may say," continued Matty. "But it was sad to see her afore I left. She wouldn't have me know it, but it isn't so easy to deceive me when anything goes wrong with my darling Miss Kate. I noticed how she fell off in her appetite, how she got no sleep o' nights, how she slaved at her music, and books, and drawings, to make believe she was just the same as ever. But she wasn't. I know'd it fast enough; and I traced it all out, sure enough. Oh, she couldn't blind her old Matty, when anything ailed her own darling! I noticed it first that morning, when she came out of the breakfast-room as pale as a sheet, and beckoned to me, as though she couldn't speak, and took and leaned upon my arm, and went up the stairs, holding by the banisters all the way; and, when we reached her room, dropping into a chair, and signing me to throw the window wide open, and getting out the words to bid me go away and leave her, and looking ready to choke all the while. Any other young lady would have fainted, but my darling has a spirit to bear her up against anything. I couldn't make it out then; but afterwards I understood it all. She'd just heard the news that he was going to India."

Fermor Worthington started up as if a pistol had been dis-

charged at his temple; and then stood leaning against the porch, like a statue, whilst Matty went crooning on:—"Robert was clearing away the breakfast-things, and heard how the letter had come from his mother summoning him away to go abroad. A dreadful time that was for her: and then came another. That evening, afore he went away, as I was standing by the glass-door in the library, I saw 'em both, plain enough, in the rose-walk together. I couldn't hear much of what was said; but I heard him say, quite distinct, just as he came to a turn, and led her back again—"the knowledge that I possess your love, will bear me through any absence;" and, afterwards, I saw 'em still pacing up and down, and talking low; and I could see him take her hand in his: though the light was fading fast, I could see that. And I could see him, at last, take her in his arms, and——"

"Hold! This is not for me—for any, to hear!" Fermor at last found voice to exclaim.

"Ay, she was displeased herself when she found I'd overheard and seen so much. But I know you won't betray me that I mentioned it, Mr. Fermor; and to you—one of the family—it don't signify, you know; there's no harm in repeating family secrets to one of the family, is there? But you're not going, Mr. Fermor, sir, are you? Miss Kate 'll be back to tea directly; I expect her every minute."

"Tell her I will see her another time; I will call again; I'll return," said Fermor, in a hoarse voice. And the next moment he had disappeared.



CHAPTER XLII.

WHEN Kate came home, and learned from Matty who had been, during her absence—the first emotion over—her second feeling was one of bitterness. "He could not wait to see me; he cared not even to stay!"

Telling Ruth and Matty to have their tea, and to put some away for her, as she should be glad of it cold, by and bye, she went to take the walk she proposed, by the river-side. With what different thoughts had she looked forward to it all that tedious afternoon. Now, it would be full of chagrin and sad rumination, with a rankling sense of injustice and unkindness.

"He does not care enough for me, to desire to see me, to await my coming back," was still her thought. "It is plain; he is utterly estranged and averse. It is well. It will strengthen me in my power to meet him with indifference—to feel indifference—indifference equal to his own."

Meanwhile, Fermor Worthington had no sooner found himself alone, and out of reach of observation, than he had yielded to his over-mastering agitation. He paced to and fro by the border of the river, for a time giving full course to his emotions. Gradually, however, his habitual self-control came to his aid; he recovered himself, he reasoned with himself, schooled his feelings to sedate tone, and compelled them into more dispassionate train. "Did I not voluntarily quit her—voluntarily resign all thoughts of seeking her love? Did I not steadily face the probability of her giving that love to another, and leave him to win and obtain it? And shall I now flinch because I find this love actually bestowed and exchanged? Shall I abandon the intention with which I sought her again on hearing her calamity? Shall I selfishly withdraw from the purpose I held of offering her aid, of tendering consolation, service, care, protection? Why, because I am denied hope of calling her mine, must I give up hope of assisting, sheltering, comforting her? Let me stifle this unworthy thought of self, and return, in all outward tranquillity and calm, to proffer a friend's hand, a kinsman's help."

It was with the external serenity engendered by such a process of thought, that Fermor beheld Kate Ireton approaching along the river-side walk. And it was with the like apparent insensibility that Kate Ireton, after her self-communing, was enabled to advance towards him. They met unconcernedly—almost coldly. His restraint and reserve of manner, assumed to

guard his own heart from selfish betrayal, confirming her idea of his estrangement; while her resolute effort to appear indifferent corroborated but too well his impression of her state of feeling. Moreover, the season of adversity through which Kate Ireton had lately passed, had been the means of disciplining her into greater power of self-command and self-possession than ever.

She was the first to speak.

"You are returned to England? Matty told me you had been."

"In my disappointment at not finding you, I came away; but I repented of my impatience, and was retracing my steps, in the hope that you might by this time be at home—at the cottage. The news of—of our loss, only reached me a few days since; I left the Continent immediately, and hastened hither to seek you."

He would have drawn her arm within his, that they might walk on together; but Kate, instinctively dreading such dangerous contact, where an unguarded motion, or treacherous, involuntary tremor, might at any moment betray her, eluded it, by leaning her back against a tree, and remaining thus, as if to listen to what he might have to say.

Heart-smitten by the cold avoidance of her manner, by such a reception, such a meeting, together with the thought of her bereavement, brought forcibly to his mind by her mourning-habit and altered mien—Fermor could only stand silently regarding her.

As he gazed upon the motionless figure, with its drooped head, and face hidden from him by the straight straw bonnet—the coarseness of her garb suddenly struck him; for Kate, in consonance with her system of frugality and self-restriction, had adopted the commonest and cheapest kind of clothing. This slight circumstance struck Fermor with a strange sense of additional discomfort and distress, irking and fretting him with its palpable present token of her impoverished fortunes, her changed existence.

He made some hasty, irrepressible allusion to it.

"Is it possible such trivialities can engage the attention of the Iron Cousin for an instant?" said Kate, with a curling lip. "I have no superfluous money to throw away upon dress; nor, were I ever so rich, should I do so, especially now. To my thinking, there is a species of irreverence in fine mourning. The solemn fopperies of crape and broad hems, of jet and bugles, the ceremonial formalities of black trappings, the appointed grades in bombazine woe, appear to me little better than insult to the sincerity of that grief which muffles the beating heart in unseen sables, and shrouds it in weeds of deepest and darkest hue. The mourning suit signifies little; the simpler and humbler it is, the better."

"But surely, there is no need of this ultra-homeliness of apparel," said Fermor.

"Suppose I choose to be extravagant in what I deem due plainness?" returned she.

"It is more than due plainness; such coarse garments as these are not fit for your wear, Kate. These clumsy shoes, this common stuff gown, this rough poke bonnet, are not fit——"

"Was it for this you came back? Did you retrace your steps, for the purpose of discussing my mode of dress? Besides, the Iron Cousin's just sense of propriety might tell him that this plain style precisely befits a village school-mistress."

"It was for that I returned—for that I chiefly came to seek you; to dissuade you, Kate, from pursuing that unworthy course of life."

"What is there unworthy in honest work?" she said.

"Do not misconstrue me, Kate. I mean, unworthy of you—of your previous habits, of your refinement, your education. I should perhaps have said uncongenial life, rather than unworthy."

"Whatever advantages I may have had formerly, will but help me the better in my present life," she said. "Cultivation and education will avail, where ignorance might have failed,—and I am not fond of failure."

"But why need you stoop to so humble a career—to so lowly a condition?"

"Oh! it is the degraded station, which our proud Worthington fears, is it? The master of Worthington Court dreads what may be said, if a relation of his earns her bread as a poor teacher."

"Once more, Kate, I say, do not misinterpret me," Fermor said in his grave, full voice. "You *know* it is no thought of the sort which prompts me. But I cannot have you pursue this course. It hurts me to think of your being obliged to toil for daily subsistence. I cannot have you do it."

"You 'cannot have!' And why so, pray? What, after all, has your sufferance to do with the point?" she said impetuously.

"Kate, hear me," he answered. "I am now your natural guardian and protector—your nearest male relative—well nigh the sole one you have upon earth. I stand in the position of a brother to you, now, Kate; let me fulfil the part of one; let me have the proud joy of feeling that you look upon me in the light of one and that as such, you become my care."

"Even a sister might hesitate—might disdain—to accept provision from a brother, when she could maintain herself without becoming a burden upon him. Do you not think I may have my own proud feelings to consult as well as yours, good cousin?" she replied.

"You have them but too surely, too strongly, Kate," he returned. "You have too much pride, alas! Better forego some of it, in favour of kindness and kinship. Remember your own noble, simple words as a girl.—when you said that, did you require money, you would not refuse to take it from me, since you would willingly give me some of yours; that relations need not be nice upon such points, or care which helped the other. Think of your right-minded, honest sentiment, when years had but confirmed your clear and just-seeing views, and you declared that the amount of a gift did not constitute its value, and therefore amount should not cause hesitation in acceptance. Why persist in declining a proposal made but in consonance with your own upright, true, ingenuous admission? Why not act in conformity

with your own childish candour of opinion—that cousins need not care which helps the other? You would do no less for me, were it my strait, instead of yours, Kate; why not believe that I have equal earnestness of wish to serve you, since it is my chance to be the richer; and suffer me to help you as you would help me, were our cases reversed?”

“A hasty youthful speech is not to bind me now, that I have learned to think differently from what I did, when I had the power to bestow as well as to receive,” said Kate. “I have neither the one nor the other now. My loss deprives me of the ability to give; my poverty denies me the right—the pleasure—to accept.”

“Kate, if not for your own sake, yet for mine, consent to do as I would have you,” urged Fermor. “How do you believe I can, with any comfort, lie softly, eat luxuriantly, live idly, yonder at Worthington Court, knowing that my own kinswoman is lodging humbly, faring hardly, drudging unduly, the while?”

“You have nothing to do but to sleep upon the boards, feed upon bread and water, and work like a horse, if the contrary distress you. There will be something in the way of life that will have its charms for the Iron Cousin, who has a passion for self-denial, austerity, rigour of abnegation. A thousand pities he did not live in his own age of iron, or in the time of hair shirts, fasts, disciplines, and penances. What a right glorious and ferruginous saint he would have made! He might have worn a girdle like St. Somebody, to eat into his flesh, only he would have worn a rusty chain in lieu of a well-rope. He might have retired to the top of a pillar for his forty years’ abode, like St. Something, only he would have added a sharp spike to the beatitudes of his resting-place.”

“Kate! Kate! I am in earnest—in deep, vital earnest,” said Fermor, “and you will jest.”

“Best let me jest while I am in the humour,” she replied; “if I take to earnest, I may say something that may displease you worse than my jesting.”

"Nothing can be less welcome to me than your treating as a jest what I would have you consider earnestly, seriously, Kate," he said.

"Then take my serious answer," she replied, in as grave and firm a tone as his own. "I have considered this question; considered it carefully, finally. I have made up my mind that I will never be beholden to any one for a livelihood—relation, or no relation—while I can earn a living for myself by my own exertions. I am young, strong, healthful, with faculties of average capacity. Many—better, worthier by far than myself—have to work for their bread. I may have still another motive; but why need I state it? Yet I will—once for all—that you may understand me thoroughly, decidedly, and that the question may be henceforth at rest between us. I may have a certain end of my own in this determination. I may propose it to myself as a probation, a test, a trial, a task. I may have a secret incentive to support me in my intention to labour patiently, sincerely, perseveringly, in a humble, honest, self-dependent path. I may have such a view, I say, and I ask you, my kinsman, my friend, not to seek to move me from my purpose. Crow-bars should not do it; the Iron Cousin shall not—will not—if I beg him to desist."

There was a glow of resolve, a tone of high-set determination in Kate's manner, as she said this, which impressed Fermor Worthington with the idea that this motive, this secret, powerful incentive she spoke of, was no other than her attachment to Cecil Lascelles; and that her view in thus choosing to work diligently and self-helpingly, was to preserve her independence for his sake. There was much of heightened admiration, mingled with bitterness, unspeakable bitterness, in the thought.

In the gall of the latter feeling, he hurriedly said, "The Iron Cousin should not suffer himself to yield beneath entreaty; he should know how to refuse an unreasonable request, to deny unfit demand."

"It is not to be doubted that the Iron Cousin can steel himself against aught that interferes with his own sublime will and

pleasure, his own high and mighty sovereign iron will," said Kate, at once relapsing into her wonted light scoffing tone and haughty speech, upon his resistance to her appeal. "But there shall be no question of his yielding to supplication. He shall have no trial of his power to withstand entreaty. I do not now 'beg' him to desist; I desire him to do so; and merely request him to understand that I do not require his sanction or his counsel, his permission or his approval. I abide neither refusal nor denial. I acknowledge no right of his to grant or to withhold—to consent or to forbid. His version of guardianship is dictatorship; his signification of protection is authority to control, right to prescribe. If to recognize guardian and protector in my sole relative on earth, be to relinquish liberty of judgment over my own actions, then I renounce kindred altogether, and will strive to suffice to myself in my passage through the world."

Kate felt herself to blame; but with her characteristic impetuosity and natural wilfulness, joined to her old special perversity of feeling, where Fermor Worthington was concerned she could not help persisting. She felt that this was not the way to commence her proposed task of moral amelioration and self-chastening; she knew that she should arraign herself, and suffer severely from remorse and reproach of conscience, on a subsequent reviewal of her conduct; but still she could not subdue her impulse at the moment to yield to the excited and variously-compounded tumult of emotions that surged within her.

"You speak harshly, Kate," Fermor said, after a pause, during which he had been gathering calmness to reply, without showing how deeply her words hurt him.

"I speak openly; as you know I always do. That is one reason, had I no other, which would determine me never to become dependent on a relation for bread. I should choose to reserve freedom of speech and behaviour; and that could hardly be, were I to sacrifice independence, and deliver myself up a bondswoman, a stipendiary, a pensioner on another's bounty. You know I have always used liberty of retort with the Iron

Cousin ; and I intend to maintain my right to do so, whenever it pleases me,—if it do not affront him.”

“ It cannot affront or offend me ; but—” he stopped

“ If he do not object to it,—disapprove of it ”

Fermor Worthington was silent.

“ Pray let there be explicit answer,” she said.

“ You know, Kate, I have never spared you, nor flattered you I,—I—regard you too truly, to allow me to do either ; and I cannot tell an untruth, even to please you. I may not say I *approve* your cutting speech—your wounding manner ; for they are, I too keenly feel, the one point that mars all else in you. Kate,” he added, with an attempt to speak smilingly, “ till he can inure himself to bear more philosophically—as he should do, since they deal but according to their nature—these diamond-pointed thrusts, the Iron Cousin will abstain from exposing himself to their assaults. Sir Dullarton has asked me to go for him to Scotland, and settle the title deeds of a small estate—a shooting-box—he has in the Highlands. I ask but one thing of you, Kate. If you should desire a kinsman’s aid, a brother’s counsel, a friend’s help, do not omit to write to me,—to,—to your Iron Cousin.”

It was well that Kate Ireton was still leaning against the young oak-tree ; it enabled her to sustain her limbs ; to conceal their trembling and the throbbing of her heart ; and gave her time to command her faltering voice, ere she replied. She nerved herself to utter the simple form of “ Good bye ! ” to receive and return the quiet shake of the hand ; to see him turn away, and vanish slowly from her sight.

She walked straight home. Her step was even ; her eyes dry ; her face stedfast. But her hands were icy cold ; her lips were colourless ; there was a stringent contraction of the brow ; and within her bosom, her heart felt like a leaden-bound burning spot,—where, spite of all, lay the consciousness that were it to go through again, she should act precisely as she had done. Altered as she was —unchanged as he was,—she felt that she must still treat him thus, in order to keep from him and from herself the secret thirst to treat him differently.

The last thing at night, Matty said to Kate suddenly: "I for got to show you what that good, thoughtful Mr. Fermor gave me to buy physic and the best medical 'tendance that could be got, when I was telling him about my rheumatics. He's different from a most young gentlemen, is Mr. Fermor; he's thoughtful, and considerate, and hears one out patiently, while one's speaking of one's worrits and miseries. He don't interrupt. He lets one talk on in peace—and that's a comfort. See here!" she said, as she put a bank-note into Kate's hands. "He's a generous, good-hearted gentleman, for all he's like his father before him,—just a bit cold and distant, and marbly-like. But it's more manner, than reality. He must have some feeling, to think of making me such a handsome present to get doctoring with."

"You did not tell me what he gave you," said Kate, absently.

"Why, you're looking at it, Miss Kate, my darling."

She was looking at it; but did not see it,—as money. Sum and amount were invisible to her; she beheld only something that he had touched; something that he had given, kindly, thoughtfully, generously. She kept it folded, just as it was, enclosed between her palms, with a sense of treasured content; while she answered Matty by some playful rejoinder, saying she would take care of it for her.

"So do, darling. Not but what I can take care of it myself. I a'n't nowise careless. I could always be trusted with money of other people's; and I dare say, I shouldn't be less trustworthy with my own. But I like you to take charge of it for me. I'll tell you what I've been thinking of, Miss Kate. I mean to knit Mr. Fermor one of my best purses, in return for his kind present. I noticed he had the shabbiest old purse of his own, poor young gentleman; he is but a bachelor, and hasn't nobody to look after him a bit, and see that he has things handsome and proper about him; and so I shall knit him one of my very handsomest."

"Oh the pride of the clever knitter!" exclaimed Kate. "Oh, the skill-conceit of you 'spinsters and knitters in the sun!"

"Well, perhaps I do think myself a tolerable knitter; but as for t'other, no need to twit me with being a spinster. There's no call to cast that up to me. There's worse titles for us women than 'old maid.' It a'n't every woman's fortune to get married; not but what I might ha' been, over and over again, if I'd chose; but no matter for that!"

"Of course you might, Mattykin! When these kind old eyes were bright with twenty summers' sunshine, I'll be bound they could count their murderous deeds by scores. And they're still sharp enough, a'n't they? sharp as your own knitting-needles. Their sight don't fail them a jot. I shouldn't wonder if they noticed even the colour of that old shabby purse you were talking of."

"That they did; my eyes haven't lost their quickness, though mayhap their brightness is gone. I a'n't blind, thank Heaven! Although my old eyes mayn't be, to look at, what they were when that saucy Dick Dimble—Ben's father, Miss Kate—used to call 'em sparklers; yet they can see pretty nigh as plain as ever. And to prove it to you, my darling, I'll just tell you that I took notice Mr. Fermor's old purse was a dark brown; for all the world like that strong stout one I made you for a travelling-purse, when you went abroad to foreign parts last year. But I'll make him a beautiful new one; fit for such a gentleman as he is to wear."

Still folded in four,—smooth, and delicate, and welcome to the touch—dear and hallowed to fancy—the cherished note lay beneath Kate Ireton's pillow that night. In many things she was yet a very child,—and a very woman too.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE tedium and void of her present existence seemed redoubled to Kate, after the brief re-appearance of Fermor Worthington. It was like the chilling withdrawal of the sun after a burst of

spring warmth and brightness. Deepened shade coming upon passing shine ; disappointment shutting out a glimpse of promise. But it was the result of her own deed, and she told herself that she was content.

She pursued her solitary rambles after her daily toil, as the surest means of rest, for both frame and spirit. Exercise and open air, acted restoratively for cramped limbs, and afforded refreshment for jaded, weary, stifled oppression ; while free motion, free breathing, free feeling, served best to rouse from stagnant or one-currented thought.

Once, as she extended her walk farther than hitherto, allured by the beauty of the evening, and the retired quiet of her path, Kate found herself near to the wooded enclosures of Heathcote. She turned abruptly from the stile beneath the hazles, not choosing to linger there ; but walking on a little farther, she stood leaning against a small wicket-gate, and looked over into the park glades.

There was not a leaf stirring, not a sound to be heard. Solitude the most perfect, peace the most complete, reigned around her.

While congratulating herself upon the seclusion and privacy of the spot, the recollection crossed her mind of the time when her boyish cousin had said that it was not well for her, a young lady, unattended, unprotected, to go out alone ; and she smiled to think how securely now, the humble school-teacher could walk whither she would, unnoticed as unaccompanied.

The thought had hardly passed, when she heard a horse's footstep approaching, along the lane. She maintained her position, without moving, or looking round.

Presently she heard a strange voice say : " Can you tell me the nearest way to Dingleton, my girl ? "

There was something in the tone that grated unpleasantly upon her ear ; and she glanced over her shoulder to see how the appearance assorted with the speaking-voice. She saw a well-dressed man on horseback ; whose look and air as much belied the gentlemanly apparel, as it confirmed the impression conveyed by his tone and manner.

Kate relapsed into her former attitude.

"By Jove! what a beautiful face!" exclaimed the man to himself. Then he added, aloud: "Do you hear, child? Why don't you answer?"

"I hear; but I am not bound to answer, or direct you. I am no finger-post. There is one farther on, at the end of the lane. Go on, and you'll find it."

"But I don't care to go on just now, since I've fallen in with something better than a post. I'd rather you would guide me. Pr'ythee tell me—nay, why won't you be civil, my beauty, and turn round, and attend, when you're spoken to?"

"When you address me properly, I may attend."

"And how, pray, are you to be addressed, pretty one?"

"By none of the titles you have used."

"How then?"

"I am not in the habit of giving my address to strangers, especially those with no letters of recommendation—in speech or look."

"No? Then till I find out your address, I'll try and content myself with finding you away from home."

The man precipitately dismounted, and came towards her.

Kate turned like a startled fawn, terror-stricken, but standing at bay.

The man pressed close, and looked under her bonnet with insolent scrutiny.

"Keep back! I am not accustomed to such rude approach!" she said, breathlessly.

"Suppose I teach you, my haughty village fair one—my queen of cottage-maidens."

Kate's heart beat thick. She looked round desperately for help. At the moment she felt the ruffian touch upon her shoulder, the bold rude breath against her very face, she espied Ben Dimble crossing the lane. Crying rapturously "Ben! Ben!" she wrenched herself away, flew swiftly after him, clung to his arm, and hurried onwards.

"Oho! a rustic sweetheart! But I'll not lose sight of the

mench. I shall find means to meet her again. By Jove! she's as handsome as an angel, though proud as the prince of fallen ones—Lucifer himself."

"What has frightened you, Miss Kate? Who has harmed you? Some one has insulted you. If I thought that—let me go back and thrash the fellow, whoever he may be."

"No, no; go with me home. No matter for the man. Leave him alone; since I've made my escape, let us think no more of him."

"If he's the chap I have half a notion he must be, from the glimpse I caught of him," muttered Ben, beneath his clenched teeth, and expressively doubling his clenched fist, "I'd return, and not leave him till I'd sent every tooth he has down his throat, and mashed every bone he has in his skin to a jelly."

"Why, who do you suspect him to be, Ben? He seemed to me a stranger hereabouts. I have never seen his face before. He's no one of the neighbourhood, I think."

"If it's the man I mean, it's Sir James Baddeley, the young baronet." And Ben ground something between his teeth that sounded like a deep bitter curse.

"Sir James Baddeley! I think I have heard Mr. Huntley mention him."

"Yes; he's staying up at our place now. He has often visited at Huntley Lodge—more's the pity—before now. But I'll keep an eye on him and if it be he——" Ben's tongue left his speech unfinished; but his look concluded it fiercely and expressively.

"Ben, you must not think of resenting this man's outrage. It may cost you your place. Think of White Beas and Chestnut Phillis. Care not for the insult to me; I care no more for it myself, now it is past."

"May be not altogether for your sake, I owe him a grudge Miss Kate: but no matter," said Ben.

"Give up revenge, for your own, Ben," said Kate Ireton.

"'Tis for more than my own," muttered Ben. Then he added something in a clearer tone about the horses; telling Kate that they were sleek, and well, and well off.

"And I trust you, Ben, are well off too. I hope you like your place."

"It's as good as it can be," he answered; "since I'm with Bess and Phillis, and since I can't be at the old Hall, I'm as well placed as I could wish. Why, there's——"

He broke off suddenly, as, at a turn of the path, Ruth Field came in sight. The slight limp, the stoop, the frail slender figure, announced her at once.

"Why, Ruthy, you have ventured far; you know I don't approve of your over-walking yourself; and I fear you have come this distance on my account."

"I grew anxious; it became so late, and you did not return," answered Ruth.

"Ben, give her your arm. She must be fatigued, I am sure."

But though Kate Ireton dropped her hold, in token that he should give all his care and support to Ruth, Ben did not offer them.

"I shall do very well," said Ruth Field. "I am getting much stronger, much better able to walk than I used. You have made me a new creature, I think," she said, looking up at Kate, with her soft smile.

"Ben, you will come as far as the village with us; you will come and see Matty. Ruth and I invite you in her name."

Ben glanced at Ruth; but as she kept quietly looking down, while she moved on, and said no word in fartherance of Kate's proposal, he stammered out, "Thank you, Miss Kate; I thank ye kindly; but I—I think I can't stay longer. I'd best return. And now you're within safe distance of home. So—so I leave you, Miss Kate."

"As you please, Ben; only mind, I shall hope soon to hear more news of Bess and Phillis."

After Ben had left them, Kate made Ruth lean upon her, saying playfully, "Come, since you've driven abler support away, you must content yourself with mine."

"Driven away!" said Ruth.

"Yes; what was your cool non-seconding of my invitation,

but driving the poor fellow away?" said Kate. "Ben is modest, and wants a little kindly encouragement. He is the least forward or presuming, of any young man I ever saw. He is as humble and diffident as though he possessed no tithe of the good qualities he really possesses. He is faithful, constant, and firm in his attachment. He is warm in feeling, sterling in principle, and high in honour, though no higher in grade than a simple stable-lad."

"No one knows Ben Dimple's excellent qualities better than I do," said Ruth Field, quietly, but earnestly. Her manner was chiefly remarkable for extreme quietness with extreme earnestness.

"Then why did you not show a little more graciousness, when there was a question of his coming with us?"

"You had asked him; if he had chosen to come, that might have sufficed. There was surely no need of my adding weight to your request. But who are those girls he spoke of? Fellow-servants?"

"What girls, Ruth?"

"Bess and Phillis; I thought he mentioned two by those names. Or you did, to him. And I imagined they might be fellow-servants of his formerly, at Heathcote, in whom he—in whom you took an interest."

Kate threw a quick bright glance at Ruth. Then she answered smiling, "Fellow-servants of his, did you say? Well, yes; fellow-servants."

"What kind of young women are they?" said Ruth, presently.

"Not young women at all," said Kate.

"What kind of girls, then?"

"Not girls, either," answered Kate.

"Not girls! what then?"

"Mares," replied Kate, drily. "White Bess was my favourite saddle-horse; and Chestnut Phillis was my dear uncle's. Ah, Ruth! many a happy gallop have we had on those two beautiful creatures! And good Ben loved them so well for his old master's

sake and for mine, that he would have followed them anywhere to be still their faithful groom and attendant. Kind-hearted excellent Ben ! ”

“ Kind-hearted excellent Ben ! ” echoed Ruth Field.

“ I fancy the kind heart is most kindly and fully devoted to you, Ruth,” said Kate.

“ I know it is,” answered Ruth Field, simply, but with much feeling. “ I know it, and I am sorry, sincerely sorry. So good a heart should have as good a one in return.”

“ And where will he find a better one than Ruth’s ? ” replied Kate, warmly.

“ You know not its imperfections, its weaknesses,” said Ruth Field, with a deep blush. “ I, alas ! know them but too well— am only too deeply conscious of them. All that I can say on my own behalf is, that I do not meanly yield to them ; they are not felt, without a struggle to subdue them.”

“ It is all that we can any of us endeavour to do,” answered Kate, with an inward sigh.

And they walked on in silence.

Time went on. The being compelled to give up her walks was a severe deprivation to Kate Ireton. It rendered doubly irksome her unwonted toil and confinement ; it left the mental and bodily fatigue of the day unsucceeded by relaxation ; it made the close-pent monotony of the school-room an unrelieved oppression ; it gave her nothing to look forward to, from which she might reap vigour, fresh spirit, fresh endurance.

A kind of lassitude crept over her frame ; a degree of pallor stole upon her face, and her spirits betrayed a certain involuntary flagging. Ruth Field had gathered the reason of her ceasing to walk out after school was over, and more than once offered to go with her ; but Kate, fearing lest the fatigue should be too much for her companion, declined. However, after some time, Ruth’s health and strength so visibly improved, that Kate consented

they should take a little turn by the river-side together, at first; then farther, and farther, until at length they rambled a considerable distance.

One fine half-holiday, they had been tempted into extending their walk beyond their usual limits; and they found themselves near the entrance of Worthington Court.

Ruth expressed a great desire to see the place, which was celebrated among the fine country-seats, saying that she had heard the master of the house was absent, and that it would afford an excellent opportunity of gratifying her wish, and of obtaining rest. This latter plea determined Kate Ireton in assenting.

"You know Mr. Worthington, I think? I remember seeing you with him, when he came that morning to the school-house to pay a subscription for a friend. I heard who he was, and who you were, for I asked; the incident of a lady and gentleman on horseback calling there, causing some sensation in our little community. You are well acquainted with him?"

"We are cousins," said Kate.

"Ah! then there can be no difficulty in our gaining access. Though I've understood he does not object to strangers seeing the house and grounds, when he is absent."

An old woman, nearly bent double, now came forth from the Lodge.

"Ay, sure," she answered. "Master's away, and the servants have all had leave to go for a holiday, till he comes back. I'm left in charge, and I can show you the place, well enough. What though I'm not so upright as I used to be, and though I've lost my hearing a bit, and my old eyes are not so good as they were once upon a time? I'm strong and hearty yet, and I've got my faculties, thank God, as good as ever."

Kate saw that the old lodge-keeper retained no recollection of herself; and it had a strange kind of pleasure for her to find it was so. She could the more unrestrainedly enjoy the pleasure it gave her to find herself here—unknown, and unobserved, as unexpectedly.

They stood upon the broad stone terrace. The slanting beams

of the afternoon sun fell upon the foliage of the fine old trees casting varied light and shadow upon their gnarled trunks, and upon the slender boles of the younger-planted ones, and bringing into glowing effect the verdant lawns, and swelling knolls, and sweeps of park scenery.

"What a pity that unsightly building should be stationed just there!" said Ruth; "it impedes the view, and is ugly in itself. I wonder the owner of so beautiful a spot should suffer it to remain."

"It is of service as an ice-house, I believe," said Kate.

"What did ye say? A nice house? I believe you!" said the old woman. "Few seats in the county can match with ours. The mansion is a perfect pictur'. All the folks says so as sees it."

"We were talking of the ice-house yonder," said Ruth, whose quiet but penetrating tone made her readily understood by the deaf dame. "I was wondering why it should be allowed there, so un-ornamental as it is."

"Oh, ah, yes! it's no great ornament, to be sure; but there's reasons for its being kep' up, ye see. I know more of them reasons, p'rhaps, than any body living. Cur'ous enough, I chanced to come acquainted with them reasons, when not a soul know'd I know'd 'em. I'll tell you all about 'em, for they're cur'ous, and it was cur'ous how I come to know 'em."

"If they're a secret, don't repeat them," said Kate.

"What does she say?" said the old woman, appealing to Ruth.

"That if those reasons are a secret, you should not repeat them."

"Well, they're a secret, and they're not a secret. Not a soul knows 'em, I fancy, but myself; and yet if the whole world know'd 'em, it'd only be the more to master's credit. You must know, a long time ago, when old master was alive, he and young master (master as is now) was standin' on this here terris, just as we might be; and they fell into talk about yon ice-house—young master vowing it was a vile, ugly heap o' rubbish, only fit to be

pulled down. Old master was one who never liked to be told anything; but chose to have all seem his own notion, and his own doing. Well, he answered mighty stiff, and grand, and freezing—as he used to. Then I heard young master answer quick and hasty, as if he was provoked; and then he said he didn't want to be disrespectful, but he did think the ice-house ought to come down; it was so hideous, and so in the gang-way. Then I heard (I'd come out to get some plaintain, you see, for my canary-bird, knowing it grewed very fine and plentiful just by the terris, so I was close to 'em both, underneath, in the shadow of the terris, and heard 'em quite plain,—more by token, my hearin' was as quick as a mole's then, though I kep' as mute as a fish while I listened, and I heard) high words pass between 'em. Some'at about being impertinent and meddlesome from old master; and obstinate and immoveable, from young master. And then old master said: 'You can do as you like, when I'm dead and gone; you'll be master here then. Till then, I am master; and not a brick shall be touched.' There was a stop of a sudden; and then I heard young master say: "'Tis the first time in my life I ever forgot myself to you, father; it shall be the last. Forgive me! Never while I live shall a stone of the place be removed.' Cur'ous enough, an't it, I should chance to hear how that old ice-house is left to stick where 'tis. And stick where 'tis it will, to the end o' time, as sure as my name's Dorcas Price. I know what stuff young master's made on. He does what he ought, through thick and thin. If that heap o' rubbish was twice as rubbishy, and twice as ugly as 'tis, he'd never have it down, as long as he lived, after what he'd said to old master. And for my part, I think he's right."

"So I think, Dorcas," said Ruth Field.

"So I think," was echoed within the depths of Kate Ireton's soul.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"AND now, come along, and I'll show you the house," said old Dorcas, hobbling away to the glass door which gave admission into the library.

Kate Ireton lingered for a moment, letting the others pass in before her, as she looked at the profusely climbing honeysuckle. A few late blossoms still were there, although the season was advanced. She hastily plucked them: and, prompted by a bashful sensitiveness, hid them within the bosom of her gown; forgetting that she might have worn them openly without risk.

As she rejoined Ruth and Dorcas, the latter was saying: "Yes, this is the grand libr'y—the show-libr'y; and a fine spacious room it is, with its heaps o' books, and its handsome lounging-chairs, and its convenient tables; but there's a snug little libr'y up-stairs, that master uses as his own private sitt'n'-room, that's a deal cosier to my thinkin'. And he seems to think so too, for he's fond of sitt'n' there. Afore he set off for Scotland, he took a deal o' pains with that little room, and had it refitted and re-done up. I'll take ye to see it, directly; but first, I must show you the pictur' o' little Fermor Worthington, pretty creatur'."

"A portrait of Mr. Worthington, when he was a boy?" asked Ruth.

"No; the little girl; the first Fermor Worthington, that died afore young master was born. When he come into the world, his father and mother give him the same name as the child they'd just lost. Queer fancy, warn't it? Though a pretty un, too, to my notion. Howsumever, the pictur's main pretty; and so like young master, that it might ha' been done for him when he wore frock and sash. There s the same dark blue eyes, with the smilin' look in 'em, while the mouth keeps serious and grave."

"It is indeed a beautiful face—a face even more than beautiful," said Ruth, softly. "Is it not? And she turned in appeal to Kate Ireton. But Kate was standing looking out of the nearest window, as if lost in thought.

Ruth would not disturb her, but contented herself with silently enjoying the lovely suggestive expression in the face of the child-portrait.

Dorcas now led the way up-stairs, showing them the magnificent drawing-room suite; and then, at the end of a long gallery threw open a door, saying, "This is master's own little study-libr'y."

It had the same aspect as the large one; while its single window was as thickly clustered with the luxuriant honey-suckle, as the glass-door and range of windows below. There was an extreme simplicity visible in the appointments of this small chamber. A single chair, a plain writing-table, a few neat bookshelves, comprised its furniture; while the green-shaded lamp which stood in one corner, seemed to proclaim that the occupant spent many a wakeful vigil during the night-hours, in assiduous study. But there was one circumstance in the arrangement of this spot, that peculiarly addressed itself to Kate Ireton's notice. In choicely carved oak frames, and grouped with an evidently careful regard to their best disposal, were all her own sketches. Crayon drawings, chalk studies, pencilled outlines, pen-and-ink illustrations, water-colour copies, and attempts in oil, had been all diligently collected and assembled here.

In remembering how honestly the Iron Cousin had once spoken of these sketches, viewed solely as works of art, Kate could not but believe that another motive than their merit must have caused his taking the pains to obtain them, and place them here, in his own sitting-room.

"He has a sort of liking for his wayward cousin Kate, I believe, after all," was her inward sad-smiling thought. "In spite of her faults—which his judgment cannot but condemn—his taste disapprove—still, I think, he has a pitying, compassionate, half-tender feeling towards her, as towards a spoiled child; one who

might have been worth something, had not Nature, and circumstance, and her own perverse folly, combined to render her good-for-nothing. But, since he is master of this noble place, and I am no longer upon a level with him even in worldly rank, never shall he guess she was capable of better and higher value—deserving of better and dearer esteem. Let him still believe her faulty. It will prevent his having the wish to discover what she would fain think does not exist. If she could not allow its existence when her own was prosperous, less than ever, now, will she consent to think that it can be. I am heart-free as he is, though we have each a mutual odd kind of liking, that will last through both our lives, for the sake of what might have been between us, had he been less perfect, had I been less imperfect.”

On their way home, Ruth Field yielded to Kate's frequent instances that she should stay and rest at intervals. They were sitting on the spreading root of an old tree, under a hedge, when, in the lane, on the other side, they heard a horse's foot approaching. The rider passed quite close; but the seat which Kate and Ruth occupied, was so screened, that although they could see him distinctly, he had not perceived them.

“It is the same man! What a fortunate escape!” said Kate Ireton, drawing a deep breath. “It is the man I encountered the other evening, when good Ben helped me out of my strait.”

She turned to see why Ruth made no reply. Ruth was mute, pale, and trembling violently.

“Why, Ruthy! what is this? You know that man!”

“I knew him,” faltered Ruth, turning as suddenly red, as she had before been white.

“And he treated you, as he treated me, with insult, with outrage?”

Ruth bowed assent. “Give me a moment,” she gasped “and I will tell you how it was.”

There was silence for a space. Then Ruth Field said, in her low, equable voice, "Before my accident—before I was crippled for life—I had some share of—of—good looks. I know not why I should hesitate, since I speak of what is past and gone. At that time, I chanced to meet this—this—to meet him—at a Christmas dance, which 'Squire Huntley gave to his tenants and the villagers, in the old hall, up at the Lodge, when the master of the house, and his lady, and their visitors, joined in the holiday merry-making. He singled me out—he made me his partner through the evening. He came to father's cottage next day; he haunted my walks; he pursued me unceasingly. He has a tongue, subtle, smooth, ready. How could I believe that all he said was untrue—was a mockery—a snare? He professed to love me fervently, purely. He taught me to think he loved me sincerely, faithfully. I gave him my faith in return. I gave my full, free, perfect faith to one who cared for me but as a toy, a pastime. I gave credit to his vowed protest that he sought me as a wife; and believed him when he swore that his sole thought was how to bring about our marriage. But my weak trust went no farther than the sacrifice of my girlish heart, my fond affections. Those I cast at the foot of a false idol, with the lavish reckless confidence with which youth and inexperience will throw away their treasures; while one treasure alone was reserved—honour. Peace of mind, self-respect, happiness, were wrecked, although that one chief possession was saved. By the same stroke of fate which left me lame, deformed, and stripped of all the pretensions to beauty which my face could once boast, I was left beggared of hope, of love, of faith in vowed truth. Without one parting or explaining word to soften the cruel blow, he forsook me."

Her head sank upon her bosom, as Ruth Field closed her simple narrative; and she sat speechless, motionless, resigned.

"And is it possible you can still love this man?" said Kate Ireton, after a pause.

"I thought I had taught my heart worthier strength,"

answered Ruth; "but my agitation just now, at sight of him, shows how weak and frail it still is. Yet, even now, I cannot but trust it was rather the remembrance of my former folly, than any present weakness which overwhelmed it. That it should sink, and tremble, and quail beneath a sense of shame and degradation for having once yielded itself so fondly and so heedlessly, is better than that it should be influenced by so debasing, so unworthy a passion, as love now for him would be."

"Keep in that tone of mind, Ruth, and both peace and happiness may yet be yours to recover," said Kate, pressing her hand firmly and affectionately.

"Ay, but self-respect? Where is that gone? Never, never to be retrieved. How can there be self-respect, where there is a constant sense of self-rebuke, of self-condemnation? Did I not give my love weakly, rashly? Did I not yield worship to a false image—an image only invested by my own foolish fancy with its worthy attributes?"

"You are not the first girl by scores and scores, who has had to repent that fallacious idolatry," said Kate. "Learn to look the hollow image steadily in the face, and behold the entire emptiness of its claims to your worship, and the worship will cease. Self-reproach is hardly for error of such kind. The fitter blame is for those who miss true claims to their worship, and omit not only to offer just homage, but to render themselves worthy worshippers. Your error may be redeemed, so soon as it is recognized. You have already discovered it to be delusion; and will one day be free to substitute it by a wise, a true course. When that time comes, Ruthy, you will be able to do full justice to Ben's sterling, honest worth."

"It is because I do his worth justice now, that I would not do it the injustice to give it an affection that has been degraded by a weak bestowal before. I would not so wrong it," said Ruth, conclusively. "This balmy, blessed, peaceful time—this walk—this sweet evening—will long be dear to my remembrance," she added. "It has opened my heart to the relief of confession, and to the comfort of a friend's encouragement."

Ruth's fervour of thanks to Kate Ireton, spoke through her mild, expressive, soft brown eyes.

"The impression of the entire charm of this pleasant holiday ramble will ever remain one of those rare delicious eras in a life, which are hoarded, enduring delights to the end of existence," continued she. "That beautiful place—those fine trees, that sun-lighted park, that picturesque mansion, those rich and tasteful rooms, are like some enchanting vision, yet with all the force of reality. They haunt me with such a power of vividness, that I seem yet to smell the exquisite perfume of that woodbine climber which covers one side of the house."

In her consciousness, Kate's hand had nearly stolen to the bodice of her dress, where the sweet traitorous honey-suckles lay enshrined. When she reached home, her first care was to place them in her linen-drawer, where, amid lavender and rose-leaves, they might rest secure, without a chance of the secret fragrance they had for her, transpiring with their natural odour.

And still time went on.

Re-assured by frequent walks with Ruth, when they had met no one but an occasional home-returning hind, or village-neighbour, Kate went out alone one evening intending to go no farther than the river-side walk. But falling into thought, she strayed a greater distance than she had any notion of, until roused by seeing Sir James Baddeley riding towards her; and by perceiving that no soul else was within sight, while the path there was very lonely, and sheltered in on each side by a close larch-plantation.

She reproached herself bitterly for her carelessness, but struggled to maintain her spirit and presence of mind. She walked erectly on, looking straight before her, as if not perceiving him as he came forward.

"Pr'ythee, why so coy, and so disregardful, child?" he said. "Do not pretend not to know me. You and I are old acquaintances; and now that the loutish rustic, Ben, is not here to assert a

prior claim, let us improve our first short knowledge of each other."

"It was all-sufficing," answered Kate. "No need to renew it. I desire nothing better than that we remain strangers."

"That cannot be; after learning so much of you as I did, in that one interview," he returned. "All I then saw made me only long to learn more."

"And all I then learned made me only anxious to learn no farther," she said. "Pass on your way, sir, if you please, and do not molest one who offers you no disturbance."

"No disturbance, my scornful beauty! What do you call this crossing my path, this dogging my steps, this filling my thoughts by day with your beauty, this haunting my dreams by night with your image? I think this is disturbing me with a vengeance! And I do not mean to let it pass without vengeance in return. I shall fine you heavily, my pretty haughty one, and mulct those lips for the payment." And he rode close up to her.

Kate had stood by, in a sort of recess of the plantation-paling, to let him pass onward; so that by his movement he had her at formidable disadvantage.

"How say you, my village-princess? Hadn't you better surrender at discretion? You can't escape, you see."

"Sir, since I cannot force you to ride on, my bare request should suffice. When there is no power to compel, entreaty ought to have weight, if you possess one spark of that manliness which teaches to forbear striking a male foe when down, or insulting a woman without resource. Her very inability to cope with you, should be her best protection. I am defenceless; and, therefore, have a claim upon one professing himself a gentleman."

"By Jupiter! your speech of defence arms you all-sufficiently. Do you know you are only the more redoubtable for having no weapons but those flashing eyes, that scornful lip, that haughty mien, those disdainful words? They provoke me to assault; they incite me to defeat you, my rural amazon. Once more, will you raise the siege, and yield voluntary submission? Or must I storm the rosy fortress, and take the fair governor herself captive?"

"Cowardly! unmanly!" burst from Kate's lips.

"You are only urging your fate, and exhausting the mercy of your conqueror," he said; "I would fain have you, for your own sake, capitulate and make truce. I would rather owe my tribute-money to your own concession, than to my force of arm. Beware how you tempt it."

Kate wrung her hands, in utter despair of finding one plea that could avail to touch such a man as he before her.

"By Heaven! your pretty distress only makes you doubly bewitching. Come, confess, if you will not own what I would have you—yet confess what I know is raging in your heart. Confess that you wish me at the devil."

"I cannot wish you lower than you are!" exclaimed Kate, irrepressibly.

These words brought to its acme the libertine excitement of mingled provocation and allurements with which she had inspired him all along. He leaned forward to seize his prey; while Kate uttered a piercing scream.

The next instant she heard a voice that vibrated to her heart's core, calling loudly and authoritatively upon her persecutor to forbear.

"Do you not see your attentions to that lady are unwelcome?" was presently added, in Fermor Worthington's sternest and most calmly contemptuous tone.

"Lady!"

"Ay, 'lady;' for all you may not be able to recognize one beneath a stuff gown, and straw bonnet; nevertheless, it is as clear, to any true sight, as that a 'gentleman' is not always to be found in a fashionable coat, kid gloves, and a perfectly polished hat."

"I'll tell you what, fellow——"

"Do not class me so low. Whatever your rank, I rate above your fellow," answered Fermor.

"By what right do you interfere between me and that —— lady?"

"By the right of common manhood, and by the one of being her nearest relation. I am that lady's cousin."

"Her 'cousin?' Oh, I see;" sneered he.

"No, you do not see. On the contrary, you are stone-blind to all that is honest and true. Show that you are willing to regain your sight, by offering my cousin an apology."

There was a sudden setting of the teeth, and an almost imperceptible raising of the whip; when Fermor deliberately stepped forward, and twisted it from his hand, snapped it in two, and flung the fragments into the ditch.

"If you want indemnity for your broken whip, I shall be happy to give you a new one—either horsewhip or cane, at your own choice. I am to be found at Worthington Court."

"Some hireling gamekeeper, groom, or footman there I presume?"

"It's master," answered Fermor, quietly.

"You shall hear from me."

"And welcome; though the news be of one so little worth hearing from." Then turning to her who had stood a breathless witness of the scene, he said: "Come, Kate, let me see you home. Lean on me. You tremble still. The Iron Cousin's kinswoman should have firmer nerves."

They walked on for some way in silence. At length Kate said: "You will not meet that bold, bad man, Fer—, cousin?"

"Tush! fear not, Kate. We shall hear no more of him, depend on't. Dastard and poltroon may be read in his eye. A man of courage would neither have borne what he did from me, nor offered what he did to you."

She relapsed into silence, striving to regain composure. The agitation of finding him so near, when she had believed him so distant, the dread lest his spirited conduct should subject him to risk, combined to keep her mind in conflict; but beneath all, lay the deep joy of owing to him her recent deliverance: and still she walked on, wrapped in her own thoughts.

Her speechless, passive mood, seemed coldness, constraint, averseness to him who accompanied her. As he looked upon the silent figure beside him, the head hidden under the close poke bonnet, Fermor felt inexpressibly baffled and tantalized. He bade himself draw patience from the belief that she was recovering her

spirits from their late alarm; and that, her home once reached, he should behold her bare-headed, without the hateful bonnet; should obtain full view of that face dearer to him than aught living, and satisfy his yearning to look upon it, and gather from its mien and expression how she had fared since last he had seen it fully,—in the height and bloom of youth, and health and prosperous existence. It was the haunting thought of that face which had caused him abruptly to return from his Highland sojourn. It was the effect of all involved in the remembrance of that face, which impelled him to come back. It was the ever-present idea, embodied in the single image of that beauteous and most beloved face—all the more tenderly beloved, for the profound desire to behold its owner entirely worthy of its sweet perfection,—which had irresistibly impelled Fermor to make all other considerations yield to the one imperative necessity again to look upon it, to tender it his secret devotion, to dedicate himself to cherishing, shielding, and guarding it, as much as in him lay, from care and sorrow.

Kate's influence upon the Iron Cousin had never been more potent than now, when he resolved to abjure all feeling of self, in the disinterested attachment he vowed henceforth to her. It prompted him to return and brave all, rather than absence. It gave him strength to place all his hope in that of being useful to her, by being near her; and although unpermitted, unaccepted, his vicinity might avail her as a protection. Even though his presence should be undesired, and his care unrequired—yet so long as neither were expressly rejected, but merely negatively or tacitly declined, he would be at hand to let them operate in her favour, should occasion permit.

And now, as Fermor Worthington thought of what his chance arrival had just rescued her from, he blessed the impulse to which he had yielded, that had brought him to her side once more. Within his soul, he re-vowed to abide near her at all events, at all risks; to smother his own regrets and desires, that he might be to her the calm, helpful friend,—the watchful, protecting kinsman.

CHAPTER XLV.

THIS is my cottage home. Let me bid you welcome to it," said Kate, as they entered the porch together; and she turned and gave him her hand, with a smile of gentleness, in which gratitude for his late assistance, and pleasure to see him here, mingled in simple but speaking expression. "You see it is neither miserable nor squalid—nor even so plain and humble, as your exaggerated anxiety for my comfort led you to picture to yourself. You see the village school-mistress lodges pleasantly; and none the worse, for her having learned formerly to value tasteful, refining environments." And Kate glanced round with allowable pride, at the pretty cottage-parlour, in its careful arrangement and adornment.

Fermor's eye followed hers; and then he quoted with a playfulness which served to cover a profounder feeling:

"Happy is your grace,
That can translate the stubbornness of fortune
Into so quiet and so sweet a style."

The next moment Ruth Field came hastening down stairs, to receive Kate; who presented her to her cousin, Mr. Worthington, briefly mentioning an unpleasant encounter from which he had been the timely means of delivering her.

"Let me take your bonnet; you look pale, wearied, disordered; no wonder. Let me place you a chair here; and sit quietly, while I wait upon you. It is my turn to wait now—for once—upon the head-mistress," said Ruth with her placid smile.

"And Ruthy, play your part of mistress of our cottage, and give my cousin and myself some tea. We will show Mr. Worthington that village school-teachers know how to make tea, with any lady of the land; they should, for it is their darling luxury

of refreshment. Both he and myself will be right glad of the fuming liquor that at once gratifies scent and taste,'—that 'cheers but not inebriates,'—that brings exhilaration to both frame and spirits. The Iron Cousin will not, I think, disdain the puny invigoration that lies in creamy tea, with home-made bread and butter, after his knightly exploit with a Sansloy, Sansfoy, and Sansjoy, united in one."

"If the knights of old could have commanded tea and bread and butter such as this, after their achievements, their prowess would have been no matter of marvel," smiled Fermor. "They would have reaped more force of arm from one cup and one slice than from all the enchanted goblets that ever dispensed invincibility."

As the pleasant cottage meal proceeded, amidst light, cheerful talk, Fermor had full opportunity to note the change that had been wrought in Kate Ireton's appearance.

Like many men of imperturbed demeanour and exterior calm, with apparently unimpressible natures, Fermor Worthington was really capable of powerful impression; and was even keenly susceptible upon points of comparatively slight moment. He was singularly alive to refinement in dress, as a part of the refinement he recognized in personal beauty. For one so outwardly dispassionate the effect produced by the single memorable occasion when he had seen Kate's loveliness of person to best advantage, by the aid of full dress—the ball dress—was strangely strong. It had required all his force of self-command to repress the admiring words that sprang to his lips, from the passionate sense of her beauty with which his heart and imagination were filled; while her own repellent behaviour at the time had helped to chill and calm him.

But on ordinary occasions his taste had been gratified by Kate's tasteful simplicity in dress. There was one point, in which, with the pardonable vanity of her age, she had allowed herself a somewhat extravagant niceness; she was always fastidiously and daintily shod. She wore the most delicate silk shoes and stockings,—the neatest satin or kid slippers—in doors: and the very trimmest of riding-boots, or walking-shoes, abroad.

Now, therefore, when Fermor saw her wearing stout, thick-soled leather shoes, such as no woman but a nun, or a milk-woman, would choose to wear, he felt more pained than could have been supposed, by those who know not how actually trifles affect the gravest-seeming people.

Another circumstance also hurt Fermor's sensitive delight in Kate's beauty. She had remarkably fine abundant hair; which had formerly been suffered to fall in thick, rich curls on either side her face, and lie at their shining length upon her bosom. But now,—partly in pursuance of Mr. Scrimpum's hint,—partly from feeling that they would be more out of her way, in her present daily toil and attention to children, Kate had smoothed back all her luxuriant tresses, and wore them plainly braided round her head.

But that which, far more than all the rest, struck him in her appearance, and filled him with regret unutterable, was to perceive the inroads which sorrow for her uncle, anxiety, thought, continuous exertion, and incessant confinement, had made upon her brilliancy of complexion,—that clear, bright, transparent colour of cheek and lips, which had once been unparalleled in its lustre of youthful health, happiness, and heart-ease.

As Fermor Worthington detected its loss, he felt he could have bought it back at the expense of seeing her once more her old spoiled, wilful, haughty self; and yet his truer sense perceived a higher beauty still, in the softened tone, the gentler grace of goodness, and patience, and virtuous endurance, that now lent an inexpressible charm to Kate's air. If she less moved his admiration, she only the more forcibly attracted and riveted his love.

All the while this secret comment had been proceeding with in Fermor's heart, he had maintained his share in the careless running talk that had been going on aloud. In the course of it, he could not help alluding to the undue confinement, and want of exercise and open air, to which Kate's occupation subjected her.

"How shall I hope to content the Iron Cousin?" she said

laughing. "Once he reproved me for not enduring the 'poor smell' patiently for five minutes; and now that I bear it unmurmuringly all day long, and one day after another, he is not yet pleased! There's no satisfying him. He's insatiable. He must always object, and want Cousin Kate to be doing something contrary to that which she is disposed to do, whatsoever that may be. If he had succeeded in becoming one of the Directors, he would as surely have opposed her election, and prevented her succeeding 'Lemon-face,' as he would have turned out 'Lemon-face' herself. I've reason to be thankful he was not one of the board of Directors, when I canvassed for the situation."

Fermor fervently echoed in spirit the thanksgiving, as he thought what he had been spared.

"The unreasonable objective personage objected to 'Lemon-face,' and he objects to me. He deemed her too crabbed for the office, and he thinks me too something or other. He didn't like 'Lemon-face,' and he don't approve of me. He didn't admire the old head-monitress, and he isn't pleased with the new. I don't know what he would have, for my part!"

Fermor smiled, for all reply.

"Nay, but what would you have, you most contradictory and oppugnant of beings?" insisted she.

"Well, perhaps I would have—for the monitress—something between the two. If I thought 'Lemon-face' too bad for the place, I think my Cousin Kate too good. If I didn't want the poor children to have a sour bag over them, neither do I think they need have a ——"

He broke off; turned away; and absently took up one of the books that lay upon the little side-table. It chanced to be a poem on the subject of Italy, enriched with illustrative engravings after eminent artists. In the blank leaf before the title-page, there was inscribed:—"Kate Ireton, from Cecil Lascelles."

As Fermor's glance fell upon the written words, a hot blush came into Kate's face; and as he raised his eyes the next instant, they beheld it there.

Kate Ireton could never think of Cecil—still less bear allu-

sion to him,—without betraying a painful consciousness. She could not but remember what had passed between them; it was the only time she had witnessed anything of the passion of love, and it moved her deeply. She was not like a hackneyed, seasoned young lady, who has had her half dozen love-affairs, during successive London winters. She had no notion of flirting, or coquetting. Her ideas of love were all earnest, profound, serious; the ideas of a fresh, true, unpractised heart.

That blush was like a burning stab to Fermor Worthington; and he hastily turned over the leaves of the book, to conceal his emotion. Amid them, he saw a cluster of dried forget-me-nots; and feeling as if he had trespassed upon hallowed ground—ground sanctified by tokens of interchanged affection, and blissful mutual attachment—ground that should be sacred from alien intrusion, and from others' eyes—he abruptly closed the book.

Had he dared to look at Kate's face, he would have seen a still more vivid tell-tale colour upon her cheek, at sight of those forget-me-nots beneath his observation—in his very hands.

But he steadily averted his glance; and looking up at the Italian sketch, he added something, in a level tone, of her unfading admiration for her favourite land. He had not failed to observe that this was the only drawing she had brought away with her from her old home; and although the circumstance of its containing her uncle's portrait might sufficiently account for her desire to preserve it, yet Fermor could not help believing that another likeness it contained might have had a share in inducing the desire to have it always with her. He had from the first felt a vague reluctance in recognizing the fond recollection she entertained for her Italian sojourn, as a period in which he himself had formed no part of her existence; but of late he had come to shrink from it, believing that it was tenderly associated in her mind as the scene of her first acquaintance and intercourse with Cecil Lascelles.

"Kate replied in a like manner with his own; and after a few more casual sentences, Fermor rose to go.

"And since the Iron Cousin has been permitted to invade

your cottage retreat, as formerly your study-dens, Kate, he will hope to find no exclusion for the future," he said. "He may expect admission, Kate?"

"He may expect—he will find—welcome," she answered.

The whole of next day passed in a torture of suspense to Kate Ireton. She went through her school duties mechanically; she pursued her avocations with the methodical precision, yet mindless un-guidance of a sleep-walker. Her sole spontaneous effort was to preserve her patience unabated, her temper unclouded, while engaged directly with the children; she felt that she had no right to make them suffer for her secret uneasiness; and she succeeded so far, as to preserve her superintendence of them free from a hint of crossness or sharpness. But her attention flagged, her thoughts wandered, her vigilance drowzed. Her whole soul was engrossed with the thought of how Fermor Worthington's encounter with Sir James Baddeley would terminate; whether it would end in the coward baronet's letting the matter rest where it was, or whether it would result in his sending a challenge, and seeking to obliterate his dishonourable conduct and dishonouring treatment in bloodshed and farther outrage.

With the cessation of school-hours, her longing for some period to her solicitude arose to an almost intolerable pitch. She was going restlessly forth, without any definite purpose, when she met Ben Dimble, at the very entrance of the river-side walk. She turned back with him, and paced to and fro, listening to what he came to tell her.

"You needn't to fear being troubled by him any more, Miss Kate," said Ben. "You can walk out in peace now. And knowing you'd be glad to hear this, I came off as soon as I could get away, to bring you word. He, and another young sprig o' quality as is visiting up at our place, are off together on a trip to Swisserland, quite sudden; so we're quit of him for one while, thank God!"

Kate Ireton echoed the ejaculation earnestly, fervently.

By a few fierce-muttered words which Ben added, Kate perceived on whose account it chiefly was that he owed this man so deep a hatred, and rejoiced so heartily he was gone.

"Ben," she said, "I sincerely thank you for coming to tell me this. You know not the load it has taken from my mind. It has relieved me of fearful apprehensions. For Ruth's sake, too—for yours—I rejoice that this man has left us for ever."

Ben sighed. "Do you think it wo'n't—wo'n't fret her, Miss Kate, to know that he is gone?" he said timidly.

"No; I am sure that it will not. Ruth has too just, too noble a sense of what is truly good, to retain any regret for so bad a man as he."

"Do you think so, Miss Kate—do you truly think so?"

"I do; and moreover, I think, Ben, that when she has overcome the sense of shame that besets her now, for having once loved so unworthily, she will come to perceive where she might love more wisely, more worthily."

"Shame!" exclaimed Ben, hotly. "How is she shamed?"

"She feels herself degraded by the bestowal of her affection upon one who slighted it; and would think she wronged your heart by giving it one which had thrown itself away before. But you, Ben, love her, and think none the worse of her for an innocent error—the mistake of a young, generous, inexperienced girl."

"Should I love her less, because she's been too believing? Should I love her less, because she's been hard used? I should surely love her all the better, and I do. Am I to think worse of her because she's been bad treated? She's not shamed! The shame's his!" said Ben.

"Yet she feels herself lowered," said Kate.

"She must always be much above me!" sighed Ben.

"But, feeling as she does, Ben, you must give her time; you must give her time," said Kate. "I am not without hope for you; you must not be hopeless for yourself. I noticed a look in her face, when I first mentioned you to her, and a curious little

question about our Bess and Phillis, Ben, and one or two other slight things in my friend Ruthy's manner, whenever you have been in question between us, that give me very good hope, Ben; and I desire you'll keep good hope, too, Ben—do you mind?"

"Ay, Miss Kate: I mind that you're kindly willing to encourage a poor lad. And even that shall serve to keep him in good heart. God bless you, Miss Kate!"

And Ben turned to go back to Huntley Lodge; while Kate sped back home, her heart lightened of its great fear.

CHAPTER XLVI.

It was not long ere Fermor Worthington availed himself of the granted permission to return to the school-house cottage. He was full of a project he had, for inducing Kate to take exercise on horseback, as a means of regaining health and bloom.

"You must not deny me," he said, earnestly. "I will come and fetch you after school-hours, or half-holidays—when you will. You shall appoint your own times for riding, only do not refuse."

"I have no horse."

"I will bring you a horse; nay, you shall have White Bear herself, if you will but consent."

"If I had a horse, I could not ride—I have no habit."

"You had one; what is become of it?"

"I have it no longer; I——" she interrupted herself with a laugh. "What could a poor school-teacher want with a riding-habit? It was of no use to me; I gave it away."

"To whom?"

A blunt question! Why do you ask it?"

"Because I can't think of any one about here to whom a riding-habit would be of any use."

"But a riding-habit is made of good cloth, and good cloth is useful for many things. I ripped up the breadths, and they made excellent——" She stopped, then went on, still laughing, "I really don't know why I answer all your cross-questioning, excepting that I have a bad habit of obeying the Iron Cousin."

"Of obeying him, Kate?" smiled Fermor.

"Of attending to him," she said; "of noticing him and his inquiries, of following his lead, and responding to his demands."

"Nay, I cannot allow so far as that," he rejoined; "the utmost I can admit is, that you certainly never fail to *answer* him."

"And that is no slight concession, where the questions are im——" she smiled, as she checked herself.

"Impertinent?"

"Importunate; where they amount to a cross-examination."

"Well, then, to return to the point of cross-examination—your riding-habit."

"Suffice it, that I didn't want the habit, and I knew some one to whom the cloth would be useful."

"Matty, I suppose?"

"No, not Matty."

"Ruth Field, then?"

"No, nor Ruth Field," said Kate.

"What are you saying about me, monitress?" said Ruth's quiet tone, as she came into the room just then.

"That you have not had a cloak out of the cloth from my riding-habit, Ruth. You will bear me witness, I speak nothing but the simple truth in that, won't you? Here's my good cousin, Mr. Worthington, very hard to convince that I have no riding-habit, because he wants me to ride. A pretty figure, truly, either you or I, Ruthy, humble school-teachers as we are, should cut, mounted on horseback! Preposterous!"

Ruth returned Kate's smile, with her own calm and gentle

one Then she said, "No; the cloth was turned to better purpose than either cloak or habit."

"Never mind that," replied Kate, quickly. "Enough, that the riding-habit is no longer in existence; and if it were, I should not think of riding. The Iron Cousin himself, with his knowledge of what is right and what is fitting, and with his strict adherence to what is right and fitting, even when it chances to be the reverse of pleasant, will be the first to agree that riding on horseback is not to be thought of for me now. So, that point settled, I am away to the children. Good bye, cousin; school-hour has struck."

"Stay, Ruth—one moment," said Fermor Worthington, as Ruth Field was preparing to follow Kate. "Will you tell me what really became of that habit?"

"Miss Ireton had heard Mrs. Meadows say, the younger children wanted winter pelisses, but that new ones couldn't be afforded this season; so she cut up her habit into warm little coats, glad to find she had something, she said, which could be made acceptable to one who had been so kind a friend to her. It was very pleasant work the cutting them out, and making them up, after school-hours, of an evening; for Miss Ireton kindly told me I could help her very much, though I know she said so, that I might fancy myself of use to her, and to let me share her pleasure. When the pelisses were finished, she felt some trepidation in carrying them up to the Vicarage, lest, after all, it should be looked upon as a liberty; but kind, good Mrs. Meadows took the gift so amiably, and seemed so pleased in trying them on, and remarking how smart and cosy they made her little ones look, that Miss Ireton declared, as we walked home together afterwards, she never could have thought even that riding-habit would have given her so much pleasure. 'Yet I was very happy when I wore it, Ruth,' she added with a look of tender sadness coming into her eyes; and I could see she was thinking of her uncle."

The look Ruth spoke of, might have been seen reflected in those of Fermor Worthington, as he turned away, after low-

spoken but cordial thanks to the sub-mistress for her answer to his question, and mounted his horse, and rode slowly home.

By several means did Fermor Worthington seek to render Kate's straitened circumstances less felt. He endeavoured imperceptibly to supply some of those luxuries to which she had been habituated, and of which he could not bear to see her deprived. But her sincere intention to preserve her independence; her vigilant jealousy as to their peculiar relative position—he, the owner of Worthington Court, she, a poor teacher; and her straightforward way of preventing his purposes, by direct previous refusal, before they were actually put in practice, made his task a difficult one, and generally defeated its end, when it proposed a too generous arrangement for her benefit.

One of his wishes was to prevail with her to accept of a piano-forte for her cottage-parlour. In vain he promised that it should be of the simplest form and dimensions, of the least ornate make, of the most unpretentious kind; in vain he pleaded that he himself longed for some music, and urged that it was unfair to deny him, even if she denied herself refined entertainment. She persisted in affirming that it was unfit, incongruous, absurd, outrageous; and that if he persevered, and sent it in, she should not receive it—she would return it.

"Why insist on rejecting so trifling a contribution to your daily pleasure, Kate? An instrument to one who can sing and play, is a necessity—a bare necessary of life."

"Necessaries of life that usually come under the category of elegant indulgences, and include rosewood piano-fortes among their items, are not for such housekeepers as Ruthy and I," she said. "We are better housewives and domestic economists than to suffer such articles of furniture to darken our doors."

"It shall not be rosewood; it shall be plainest mahogany," urged Fermor.

"Mahogany would shame our deal tables and we will not

have even our chairs and tables put out of countenance. We'll all maintain our simple, honest, unshameful plainness ; won't we Ruthy ? ”

“ We must all be plain, before we can lay claim to any pretensions, even of plainness,” answered Ruth Field, with a quietly arch glance at Kate's handsome countenance.

“ You agree with me, Ruth, that there need be no scruple in accepting the little cottage-piano ? ” said Fermor, eagerly.

“ I think there need be no scruple ; but as it is a matter of taste and feeling, rather than of principle, I think Miss Ireton should act as she feels inclined.”

“ Thank you, Ruthy. It would have been too traitorly had you, my co-monitress in school, my co-mistress at home, sided with my opponent.”

“ Do not treat me as an opponent, Kate,” said Fermor.

“ Have not the Iron Cousin and I always been opponents ? ” she answered, gaily. “ But in sober seriousness, I cannot accept so costly a present as you kindly propose to make me. It would be unpleasant—unwelcome—and you would not wish to force either an unpleasant or an unwelcome gift upon me.”

“ Once you did not object to receive just such a gift from me ; and even generously allowed that its cost made no difference in your readiness to receive it, Kate,” said Fermor, in a low voice.

“ Times are altered since then,” she replied, in the same tone.

“ Why make the change more bitter, by refusing a toy that would serve to revive some of the pleasantest hours of those old past times ? ” he said.

“ It is no toy—no trifle—that you would have me accept,” she returned. “ Can you not understand that a gift, which seemed to me then but a part of my indulged prosperous existence, and as such, might cost a few shillings or many guineas with equal indifference to me, in my careless spoiled-child way of receiving proffered pleasures, assumes a very different aspect to me now, when pounds, shillings, and pence are matters of daily bread consideration ? ”

"It is this very compelled change which most pains me," said Fermor. "I cannot bear that you should have to consider the questions of money and money's worth, of necessities and luxuries, of bread and cheese, and art-pleasures, so nearly, so closely, Kate."

"Why not?" she replied. "It does me good; it roots out a little of the old spoiled-child leaven, the old cry-baby pap of pampered indulgence, the old humoursome, humoured humours, that clung to me formerly. The Iron Cousin will surely applaud and aid the process, if it tend to purify and correct his incorrigible Cousin Kate."

"Not incorrigible—save in obduracy; in that she is inflexible, indomitable, invincible."

"The fitter to be her iron kinsman's kinswoman, cousin mine," returned Kate.

"Then suffer him to claim his natural share of iron will, and let it prevail this once over hers," said Fermor. "Consent to receive this gift merely in memory of bygone times."

"You know that in bygone times I always had my own way in the matter of presents. I dictated their limit of price; I appointed their range of purpose. You would not now restrict my limit, my range, my scope of despotism, would you? That would surely be an ill mode of recalling those former times, when unbounded freedom, and liberty to do as I pleased, was mine."

"Kate, Kate; well might he we both loved say, 'You always end by having your own way.'"

"And should I not, when it is a right one?" she replied.

"I cannot see the 'right' you make out in this matter. Ruth says it is no point of scruple,—of principle. Kate, oblige me by conceding a point of mere sentiment."

She hesitated.

"Kate, will you not gratify me by yielding on this one occasion, where no compromise of right and wrong is at issue, but a simple case of mooted will between us."

"You shall meet me half way, and I will give up mine," said Kate

"Agreed," said Fermor, joyfully.

"Well, then, you shall make your proposed present of the piano-forte to our school-room, that I may carry out a wish I have some time had, of teaching the children to sing; and in return, I promise you as much music after school-hours as your Cousin Kate's poor ability can supply, whenever you choose to come and claim it," she rejoined.

"Kate, when she does concede a favour, knows how to grant it graciously, generously, freely, fully," said Fermor.

"Pity she does not confer it more promptly, and more frequently, you would say, cousin mine?"

"I would say nothing that should seem to detract from the perfectness of my pleasure in receiving it," said Fermor. "A hint of reproach, when grace is accorded, is as unjust and unwise, as it is ungrateful. And now tell me your plan for the children."

"I should like them to learn to take part in the service; I know it would please our good Dr. Meadows, who has an honest pride in our village church; I should wish them to sing psalms without that abominable nasal twang, or that meaningless blare, which choir-children usually indulge in, to the infinite torture of their hearers. I should like also, to teach them to get up a few simple choruses, as a reward and a recreation, among themselves. And I feel sure, from Ruthy's expression of face, that she has a beautiful singing voice, and I mean to secure her for my first pupil, and eventually as my assistant instructress."

It was a genuine delight to Fermor Worthington to see the animated interest Kate took in her vocal scheme; it furnished her with a fruitful source of pleased thought, and supplied her with a means of relaxation, and relief from duller pursuits.

He also took occasion to minister to her minor comforts in various ways; by degrees ordering it so that she could scarcely avoid their acceptance, without positive refusal, and actual ungracious sending them back. It was now a basket of hot-house fruit, or choice wine, or poultry, or game, for Matty's consumption; or some especial kind of jelly or cake, that the housekeeper at Wer

thington knew how to make better than any one in the county and which he wished Ruth's opinion upon; or else some plant just in bloom, or fresh cut flowers from the conservatory, for Kate herself, that were constantly arriving at the school-cottage. And when she would attempt to remonstrate, Fermor had always some playful, incontrovertible argument, or unanswerable reason, why it was needful they should be retained.

Insensibly, this delicate care for her welfare, this affectionate, unobtrusive solicitude for her enjoyment and happiness, wrought its best effect upon Kate Ireton. She felt grateful—ineffably grateful. It transfused a serene joy and blissful content into her being. It filled her with a sense of guardian kindness and protection, and gentlest, tenderest watch, at hand, to shelter and preserve. It supplied precisely the element in her existence of which it had been so suddenly and grievously deprived; and she learned to dwell in spirit upon the thought of Fermor Worthington's friendship and brotherly attachment, with something of the same kind of placid reliance, and glad, all-sufficing trust, with which she had formerly regarded her uncle's love for her. The belief in the Iron Cousin's absence of particular preference towards her, gradually mellowed her own preference into a tranquil feeling towards him, keeping all warmer and more passionate emotion deep within the recesses of her heart, and enabling her to meet him in their ordinary intercourse, with the old cousinly freedom and ease of familiarity.

It was different with Fermor. His strength of principle, his honourable integrity, his scrupulous respect to the mutual attachment he believed subsisting between Cecil and Kate, his natural self-command, and power of self-control, with reticence of character, all enabled him to preserve the same exterior calm and staid equanimity he had maintained throughout; but his inward struggles were severe.

The beholding her day by day, in the exercise of her voluntary system of self-dependence, and toil, and frugal simplicity, raised her in his esteem, and heightened his enthusiasm and regard for her moral worth. It confirmed all he had hoped and be-

lieved her capable of, in rectitude and strength of purpose. The observing her gentler speech, and milder manner, touched him with added tenderness, as he thought how adversity had taught, inspired, and softened. While the constant witnessing her exquisite beauty, enhanced and sublimated as it now was, by the light of soul and heart culture, as formerly by that of intellectual improvement supervening upon native mental and personal endowments, served to increase his affection into the intensity of exclusive, passionate, all-absorbing love.

His was in fact the life of self-denial; of strictest, rigidest, most difficult self-denial. Yet he had a secret satisfaction in feeling this, and submitting to it, for the sake of her who practised the self-denial imposed by circumstance. He took a stern pride in knowing that, while he seemed to be leading a life of ease and luxury, he was enduring an inward martyrdom that out-matched the privations he saw her compelled to suffer. If she had her evils to support, he knew that he in truth had far crueller ones to contend with. But the very keenness of his perception that such was the case, gave him courage to bear them bravely; that her peace, her comfort, her happiness might be secured.

And still time went on; and still Kate Ireton worked hard, and Fermor Worthington strove hard, each intent upon their own moral and mental chastening for the sake of each other. Apart, yet together; severally, yet mutually; singly, yet collectively and conjoinedly; distinctly and individually, yet in concert and combination, did they unconsciously pursue their respective courses. Unknowingly to themselves, both were linked in one common aim; they were united in a loving bond of hopeful, elevating, strenuous endeavour.

CHAPTER XLVII.

NEARLY a twelvemonth had elapsed since Kate Ireton's loss. She had been unwilling to leave off her black garb, which seemed best suited to the shadow that had fallen upon her life; but, feeling

that at some period or other, it must be given up, she had fixed her own birthday as the one when she would resume colours.

On the eve, Fermor Worthington had been over to hear the school-children sing a beautiful simple choral strain, which Kate Ireton had taken great pains to make them execute with taste and precision.

The little concert went off to the entire satisfaction of all concerned. The two monitresses looked beaming with innocent pride at the success of their young choristers; the young performers were ruddy with mingled bashfulness and triumph, as their single auditor—a host in himself—expressed his high admiration of their excellent achievement, and dispensed various toys and picture-books among them, as prizes; while, to crown all, he had provided a feast of cakes and fruit, which was served on the school-tables, after the conclusion of the concert.

He presided, with immense popularity; while the two monitresses waited upon the little troop; for once laying aside their mistress-dignity and teacher-authority. Nothing could exceed the glee, the hilarity, the shrill enjoyment of the young revellers. While the unrestrained din was at its height—for noise forms a large portion of childish delight, and the liberty to indulge it unchecked is no slight addition to their festal pleasure—Kate called towards her a little dark-eyed, quiet, shy-glancing child, and said, “Peggy, you once told me you should like to hear this gentleman’s voice again. Do you remember it?”

“Quite well; I have been remembering it, as I first heard it, all the time I have been listening to it this afternoon.”

“And so you have taken a fancy to my speaking-voice, my little maid?” said Fermor. “Do you know I have taken as strong a liking to your singing-voice. I remarked it, among the rest, while you and your school-fellows were chanting the chorale. Will you let me hear it by itself?”

The child reddened, and looked at Kate.

“Shall you mind singing that little song I taught you, Peggy, to this gentleman?” said Kate. “He will not press you, if you do not wish to sing; and I know you are not fond of singing be

fore strangers. But he would like to hear you ; and I should like you to show him that you are willing to oblige him."

"He's not a stranger, I remember him so well," said the child simply. "And besides, I should like to try and please him, because——"

"Because what, my dear?" said Fermor, gently, seeing that she hesitated, stooping down, and taking her hand.

"Because you please me," she said, innocently, fixing her large dark pensive eyes upon his strikingly fine countenance.

Fermor Worthington's cheek—manly as it was—took a similar hue with Peggy's blushing one, at this direct childish compliment. "You are a kind-hearted, grateful little girl, to desire to gratify those who give you pleasure," he said ; "and I dare say you will also like to please your good mistress, by showing how well she has taught you to sing. Now let us hear the song."

Kate had intended that this school concert should have taken place on her birthday ; but at Fermor's request, she had fixed it for the eve, reserving the day itself for a quiet evening at home in the cottage-parlour. He had stipulated that he should be invited to tea, and that he should be allowed to come early in the afternoon, it being a half-holiday, and that they should make it a gay party and gala entertainment in honour of the occasion.

"And in order to endure it with proper observance and effect, your two hostesses will treat their sole guest with extra attention and honouring ceremony. Ruth and I will have everything in apple-pie order, and behave with even mince-pie respect, that we may receive the master of Worthington Court with fitting reverence," she answered.

"The Queen of the day will be entitled to take precedence of all others," he said.

"By special desire, and for that occasion only," she returned.

"And Kate——" Fermor tried to preserve the sportive tone

they had been using, but insensibly his voice trembled into deeper feeling. "Kate, I wish, for the sake of giving all due grace to the occasion, you would put your hair in the same way that you used to arrange it; not in that quaker guise, that straight puritan closeness and formality."

"The Iron Cousin notice such insignificant things—care for such idle vanities!" she exclaimed, laughing. "You are surely not in earnest!"

"I am indeed; as a part of old Heathcote times, I shall be glad to see the bright long curls once more."

"They shall make their appearance," she said, still laughing, "like the rest of the birthday regal style and state, for that night only."

"For that afternoon only," he rejoined. "Remember, I am to be with you early."

But early he did not come. Kate had despatched the morning lessons with alacrity, and had since been employed, with Ruth, in setting their cottage in trimmest and neatest order. But still Fermor Worthington came not; and Kate began to have a sore sense of vexation and irritable impatience settle about her heart, very much akin to some of her old perverse provoked moods of mind. However, she suppressed the rising rankle, by chatting cheerily with Ruth Field, and by bustling about actively in their household decoration.

Presently, an importantly-aiding item arrived, in the shape of a huge basket of greenhouse flowers, and rare exotics, brought by a servant from Worthington Court.

As Kate proceeded to arrange them about the room, disposing them in their best abundant advantage, she found herself thinking how far more welcome a single blossom brought by his own hand would have been. But she checked the feeling, as injurious and unkind; accusing herself of petulance, and querulous waywardness, thus to prejudge and accuse him, when in all probability he was detained by some rational and sufficient motive.

She had scarcely done Fermor Worthington this inward justice, when she saw him approaching. He had in his hand some sprays of jessamine, which she knew he must have been round to the old Hall expressly to gather for her, as there happened to be no plant of that kind anywhere near, save at Heathcote. He was aware how intimately these flowers were associated in her mind with her uncle's memory; and he had doubtless brought them as the dearest-prized birth-day token she could have.

Possessed with this feeling, she sprang forward to meet him; and as she took them from his hand, she clasped both her own round it, with a look of full-hearted thanks that thrilled Fermor from head to foot.

Never had she looked more beautiful. Although her dress consisted of nothing but a simple cotton print, yet being of a pale lilac self-colour, it had as fresh and delicate an effect, as though of silk. Her magnificent hair fell in its full luxuriance of wavy brightness, lending perfect feminine adornment to the perfectly lovely face.

Fermor Worthington had disciplined himself to bear the powerful appeal which he felt would be made to his sense of beauty, and he bore it sturdily, manfully. He knew what he voluntarily encountered, when he had asked her to arrange her hair as in former happy days; and he had told himself that he would calmly endure the effect upon his courage, for the sake of the delight of once again beholding her her own fair bright self.

True to his inward-plighted word, he betrayed no jot of the impression her appearance produced upon him; but fell into easy, sprightly talk, suited to the occasion of their present pleasant meeting.

"We have very kind neighbours in worthy Mr. Chalkby and his pretty daughter Lucy," Kate was saying; "they are truly considerate, and think of a thousand attentions by which they may conduce to our pleasure. Lucy brings Ruth the newspaper every day, knowing that Ruthy dearly loves to spell over the columns, and see what's going on in the world, though we live such hermit lives ourselves; and Mr. Chalkby sends me over all his new print

publications, whenever he thinks there are any among them likely to interest and please me. It is really most kind. He sends very valuable engravings to us sometimes. To-day, for instance, he sent in a book of charming views in the East, that we will look through together, if you will, after tea, while Ruth enjoys her paper.

As side by side they turned over the prints, a strong self-command alone enabled Fermor to preserve his usual collected tone and staid demeanour. Her proximity unnerved him; and by a cold, steady guard upon himself, he could but just contrive to answer quietly and firmly, whenever she addressed him.

There was something in this constraint, that at length struck Kate almost like avoidance. It acted as a shock; and she presently moved away. Then she reproved herself for a foolish susceptibility; and feared lest she might be giving way to some of her old captiousness, and fanciful resentment, and ungracious conduct.

Therefore, when Fermor Worthington, taxing himself with weakness, and want of steadfastness and self-possession, won her to return, she came back, and stood near to him, looking over his shoulder, as he went on examining the engravings.

Never had the Iron Cousin stronger claim to the title. Kate Ireton remained there, one hand resting on the table near him, the loose sleeve thrown partly back, discovering the white arm, encircled by the bracelet of grey hair, with the iron clasp, not many inches from his lips. Her face was invisible to him, being screened by the long drooping hair, which all but touched his; while the rich, voluptuous scent of the jessamine in her bosom, added yet another spell to the dangerously-potent impression as sailing him ever more insidiously and forcibly.

Fermor could have wished the charm of that time to last for ever; yet with each moment he felt a wild impulse growing upon him, to end it by madly touching the fair arm. He mastered himself by so strong an effort of resolute withdrawal, that it seemed like repulse; and this time, Kate thought she could not be mistaken,—he did not like to have her so near him.

As she drew back, Ruth exclaimed:—"News from India! Some sudden promotions and changes. You have friends there, I think and will be interested to see this account," added she to Kate.

Fermor ventured but one glance at the glowing face, as she moved towards the reader. He discerned in it a hope, a joy, that seemed to blacken all his own.

Presently, Ruth, chancing to raise her eyes from the paper, said:—"You are not well, Mr. Worthington. You are looking very white. This room is close and small, after your large apartments. The tea making has added to the heat. I will take away—"

As she rose to take away the tea things, Fermor said, laughing faintly:—"The evening is sultry; but I should by rights have more of an iron constitution than to change colour at a little heat."

He walked to the open window as he spoke.

Kate followed him, and laying her hand on his arm, said in a soft, womanly tone:—"Are you ill? Are you indeed ill,—Fermor?" The last word trembled forth, as if involuntarily. It was the first time she had ever called him by his Christian name.

"For God's sake, do not!—you must not call me so—I cannot bear it—I cannot have it——"

He spoke hurriedly, huskily, and it seemed to Kate with extreme annoyance. Something of her old spirit arose within her, at his evident dislike that she should address him thus. It was on her lip to make haughty allusion to their altered situation, to his wealth and her poverty, to his rank and her lowly position. But she repressed the unworthy impulse; and after a moment's struggle with herself, rejoined, in a frank, clear tone:—"You are right. It is not fit. But you must forgive me the freedom. I was thinking of your health; and forgot for a moment——" she stopped; then went on, with a smiling earnestness:—"I must not have the Iron Cousin presume too much upon his strength. Indeed you are looking pale,—not well; you must let me preach a little, in my capacity of school-mistress. Remember, I used to

bear some preaching from you,—not very well, I own; I was anything but a docile disciple,—still I endured it; and now, it is your turn to hear my sermon.”

“What is your text?” he contrived to utter.

“Your health; and my homily—that you should not neglect it. Promise me that you will profit by my doctrine.”

“I promise at least to remember it,” he said.

“Spoken like the Iron Cousin!” she said. “He listens to counsel, with the virtuous determination to observe it, and lay it to heart; whilst I used wickedly to resist and scorn good advice. But he was ever wise and good, in contrast with my thoughtless, heedless, disregarding self.”

Fermor imagined she said this in the old bitter, scoffing mood. But she spoke in all the sincere and deep humility of better self-knowledge; and in her heart she was thinking of the benefit she had in fact reaped from the effect of that very preaching she had appeared to deride and resent.

“You do well to say ‘used,’ Kate,” he answered gently. “However you may once have chosen to show a gay contempt of what seemed to you dull and prosy moralizing, you are no contemner of wholesome influences now. Witness your partiality for the simple, right-minded, excellent Ruth Field.”

“You think, then, that I am less wayward, less perverse,—that my character has,—that, in short, I have not suffered in vain, and that I am less removed from what the Iron Cousin thinks a woman should be?”

Kate (with her whole soul full of her uncle, and of what she might now have been to him—more worthy) said this with so child-like an earnestness, with such singleness of thought, with so much touching candour and innocence, merely hoping for Fermor’s better opinion,—he, who was to her the standard and judge of all excellence,—that she looked rather the young girl awaiting her preceptor’s sentence, than the grown woman addressing her equal. Could this be Kate Ireton? The fiery, haughty, uncontrrollable, wilful Kate Ireton? This appealing, up-looking, gentle creature,—with her soul sitting in her eyes full of timid hope, and soft reliance?

"I think,—I think you——" The Iron Cousin had turned towards her, and seizing both her hands, as she stood looking up into his face, which had looked into hers while she spoke, forgetting all that the universe contained, save that single countenance upon which he gazed; and as she concluded, was stammering forth:—"I think you—I think you——" when in came Ruth Field, and took up the newspaper again, proceeding quietly with the remainder of the Indian news.

Just then there was a low, distant mutter of thunder; and in the air there was that stirless hush, which is like the awe with which earth awaits a dreadful visitation. A storm seemed threatening; but as yet the sky was clear, and the evening fair. Fermor Worthington took his hat, as if to go.

"This is Thursday, I know; but must you indeed ride so far as Ditchley Manor this evening? It threatens to be bad weather; I fear you will scarcely reach there, before the storm will overtake you. Is it really needful that you should go?" said Kate Ireton.

"I unfortunately promised; and——"

"And the Iron Cousin will abide by a promise, I know," she said. "The time is gone by when I wished to actuate him to wrong-doing; I will not, therefore, seek to make him break a promise."

She left him free to go; yet Fermor seemed irresolute,—unable to stir. He lingered; still remaining near the little casement-window, where they had stood together.

"Be sure you let Fawnfoot take his best speed; remember the iron nature is ill fitted to encounter lightning, should it come on. I shall hope that the good horse will bear you to shelter quickly; and that you'll be safely housed before the storm breaks. Give me your word to ride at a swift pace. Since you must go, do not loiter."

She seemed eager to have him gone; and Fermor, with a bare word or two, took leave.

Kate watched him unfasten his horse from the paling, in the adjoining stony playground, where Fawnfoot usually abided dur-

ing his master's visits to the school-cottage; she watched him mount, and ride away, waving him a smiling good-bye, in reply to the look he cast towards the window, to see if she were yet there.

And there she stood, long after he was gone, still watching,—watching the storm gradually come on. She saw the grey blackness gathering over the sky; she saw the heavy piles of cloud change from purple to copper-coloured, from copper-coloured to swart dense masses, with sharp glittering edges, dazzling and cutting against the murk back-ground; she saw the evening close in, with a darkness more sombre than that of nightfall, while still there was that unpeaceful silence—that menacing quiet—that unrepeseful lull—throughout the air, as if Nature were expecting some fearful summons, to be uttered in uproar and tempest.

Amid the deep suspenseful pause, there was one image which fastened itself upon Kate Ireton's idea, with a distinctness and pertinacity that took place of all else. It was that look of Fermor's, while he held her hands within his own, and gazed into her face. It had none of the avoidance which she generally read in his eye, and which constantly inspired her with a sense of disapproval in its expression. There was scrutiny, eagerness—she knew not what. There was something in that fixed look with which he had regarded her, strange, inexplicable—wholly unlike anything that she had ever seen in the Iron Cousin before. He was generally calm, grave, self-concentrated, dispassionately ready for judgment and decision; at that moment, he had seemed all unguarded, agitated, quite another than himself.

That look of his stood clear, vivid, intense, before her brain's sight; when suddenly a sharp flash of lightning struck it out, and filled her mind with the sole thought of Fermor's possible danger. She knew his road lay among trees; that the hedge-rows of the lanes through which he had to pass were thickly planted with young oaks; and that, for the most part, copse woods and plantations skirted his path on either side.

The quiet motion of Ruth Field, near to her, awoke Kate from her trance of reverie. Ruth had advanced to shut the window; and with some remark upon the strengthening storm, and an expression of trust that Mr. Worthington had reached shelter ere this, she fastened the casement, closed the shutters, and made secure the cottage door, Kate Ireton and she bidding each other good night and good rest.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE window of Kate Ireton's little bed-room looked forth upon the village street; and here she stationed herself, unable to sleep or to rest, and wholly possessed with a desire, or rather with inability to do otherwise, than still to watch the storm.

The lightning-flashes increased in strength and frequency, while the rain poured down in torrents, the wind hurled wildly in short vehement gusts, and the thunder rolled incessant peals of stern, sovereign decree.

Each time the brilliant coruscation for a moment illuminated the spot, Kate could see that the village street was wholly deserted; houses were fast closed, and the inhabitants seemed all refuged within from the raging of the tempest. There was an occasional light from a window to be seen, as if the inmates were retiring to rest; but after a time these were withdrawn, and when the lightning was not present, all was in total darkness.

Some stir, some sound would have been welcome; it would have seemed like assurance, it would have conveyed the impression of activity, of living in energy, of assistance in case of need; it would have imparted a sense of human sympathy, of human courage and endeavour at hand, should peril occur. In this dread interval, while each succeeding instant seemed fraught with menace and vague terror, it would have been a kind of encouragement to see or hear tokens of animate resource. But still,

the sheeted rain, the saturated stones of the village street, the streaming walls of its cottage-houses, the glistening rapid current of the swollen gutter-channels, the vacant path and road-way leading out into the open country, were all that met her eye, when the lightning revealed what lay there; while the driving rush of the electrical wind, and the mighty ponderous issue of the thunder-mandate, were the only sounds that broke the dark silence.

Kate knew what it was, that night, to exist wholly in another's being. She seemed to live, to draw breath, but through Fermor's life and breathing. Her spirit so intimately and presently dwelt with his, that it had, as it were, quitted her own frame, and flown to inhabit his. She felt the awe and influence of the storm, but as it affected him. She was impressed by the dread, the sublime terror of the night-tempest, but as it might harm him. She shrank from the scathing flash, and trembled with the vast tremble of the thunder-roll, but in the thought of the bane with which they might be charged for him. Her body was standing within the retreat of her own cottage-roof, but its spiritual self was wandering abroad in the drenching rain, the beating wind, the alternate blinding glare and blinding obscurity of the storm-blast; subject to imminent peril amid near trees, or soaked to the skin, and exposed to the risk of wider peril in the open plains; or perchance housed securely at Ditchley Manor; or wherever by possibility Fermor might at that moment of time chance to be. In his identity hers was merged.

It was then—in that night of storm and stormy suspense, of tempest and tempestuous solicitude—that Kate Ireton acknowledged to her own soul that she loved. In the honesty and sincerity with which truth the most wilfully self-negated, at such supreme hours make themselves recognized and admitted, the fact that it was love she felt towards Fermor Worthington, stood clearly and irrefragably confessed to her own heart. She learned—she knew that only one feeling could so have blended her individuality with his, as this night's anxiety had shown her that hers was with Fermor Worthington's. For but one being in the

universe could she have experienced this intimate union of spirit and identity of existence—the being she loved as herself—better than herself—beyond all living creatures.

And then recurred that look—his look—the look with which he had regarded her, as she stood before him meeting his eyes with hers. There was something pulsing at her heart, that prompted a belief it could be no other than the expression of an emotion, which, if it existed, would indeed warrant her own. But to this came the chill confutation—why, were it so, need he refrain from avowing it? What cause was there for concealing his preference, if preference he felt? Wherefore should he hesitate, when nothing prevented him from declaring his thought? If it were love that sat in his heart and spoke from his eyes in that look, if it were passion that faltered in his tongue, and trembled in his accents, as he held her hands enclosed in his, and seemed as if he gazed what he could not speak, how should there be any reason for his withholding the secret feeling? No, it must be, that the feeling did not, in fact, exist; that she had mistaken a passing expression for an indication which was contradicted by all his ordinary demeanour; that she had idly imagined tokens of a sentiment, which the whole course of his behaviour had demonstrated to be nothing warmer than an affectionate friendship, strengthened by relationship and old intimacy, and companionship into the regard of a brother.

“And what sister would not be proudly content to own such a brother?” she thought. “As a brother, I will revere and worship him. As a brother, I will take pride in his superiority to myself. As a brother, I will strive to make myself worthy of his society, of his friendship, of his kindness. As a brother, I will feel grateful that he tenders me; and rejoice in our firm mutual regard; and lock within my own heart the secret spring of affection which adds force to mine towards him, bidding me gladly give him love in return for his liking.”

The storm without had abated; and with these tranquil thoughts within her heart, while hopefuller belief in Fermor's safety had accompanied the clearing of the night, Kate Iraton

was at length about to retire to rest, when a sound struck upon her ear, that roused afresh all her throbbing anxiety. It came nearer and nearer; and as her eye remained riveted upon the outer darkness, a sudden flash disclosed to view a horse tearing by at full gallop—riderless.

The sight flung Kate Ireton on her knees upon the floor. Prayer—soul outpouring prayer—prayer such as is sobbed aloud by the anguished spirit in such extremities, alone kept her from insanely rushing forth into the night, with fruitless essay to search—to help—to do somewhat that might seem like trying to carry succour, and assuage her own terrors by certainty at least. Prayer alone could have steadied her mind so far as to let her see how vain would be any such attempt, and have steadied her frame sufficiently to prevent its straying involuntarily and helplessly away. As it was, she remained kneeling, buried in humble, earnest, heartfelt supplication; and thus, heavily, imploringly, wore away the night.

The pallid face and haggard sleepless aspect of Kate Ireton, next morning, could not fail of attracting the attention of Ruth Field and old Matty.

They would fain have had her lie down again, and give up school attendance for that one day; but Kate would not hear of it, knowing that activity and employment were the only resources for inquietude such as hers.

“Do be persuaded, dear monitress;” said Ruth Field. “Last night’s storm has made you really unwell, besides keeping you awake. Although you will not own it, I am sure you are indisposed. Stormy weather has a strong effect upon some persons, giving them a violent headache; and I am convinced you have one this morning.”

“Yes, I have a bad headache, but I think it will not be the worse for going through my school-work. Let me try, at least.”

"You won't be able to prevail with her, when once she's set upon a thing;" observed Matty. "She was always a wilsome child and now she's a wilful woman; and 'a wilfu' woman,' as the North people say, 'maun hae her ain way.' Ay, you was always a wilsome child, true enough; but as winsome as wilsome, bless your heart! All the more pretty for having a will of your own,—it was so prettily shown, and somehow it came so natural to you to have your own way; it was just yourself, Miss Kate, my darling!"

"And now I am going to ask you to give me my way—and then it will be your gift, and not my own will, Mattykin," said Kate; "you and Ruthy prevent my insisting upon doing as I like, by letting me do as I like as soon as I express a wish. And I really wish to attend school to-day."

Kate's desire to fulfil her duties, as the best means of affording wholesome and effectual counterpoise to her secret anxiety found its reward, in gaining her intelligence upon the point that absorbed all her thought.

The children, before lessons began, were interchanging village news, and the events of last night's storm were under discussion. Kate heard one of them tell another, that in the hamlet where she lived, a gentleman had been thrown from his horse, and badly hurt. That he was found in the road, lying stunned; that he was taken into the nearest cottage. That he was not recognized at first; but that afterwards he was known to be 'Squire Worthington of Worthington Court. That a doctor had been sent for, who said that he was on no account to be removed at present, as brain-fever might come on. That the old woman who owned the cottage had undertaken to nurse him; and that he was to remain under her care, until he should be pronounced fit to be carried home.

Even these tidings were something to Kate Ireton. Her imagination had pictured so many fatal possibilities, that to ascertain what had actually happened, seemed at first almost like relief. But soon the reality tortured her with its painful facts, with desire to learn more particulars, with thirst to know, above all, how he now fared.

As the day waned, and evening set in, the thought of another long long night of suspense seemed almost more than Kate could bear. The idea of any amount of difficulty or fatigue, was welcome, in preference to that weary passive waiting—doing nothing fearing everything.

She made up her mind ; at all risks, she would obtain some thing of certainty.

The last thing at night, before she went into her own room, she repaired to Matty's, and sat with her, talking and chatting, until the old nurse fell into a sound sleep. Then Kate Ireton softly opened a drawer, and took thence the red cloak and black silk hat which belonged to Matty, but which, since the rheumatism, had been laid by in lavender. These Kate carried away with her to her own room ; and when there, equipped herself in them, tying the black silk hat closely down over a thick muslin cap beneath which her hair was carefully put back and hidden, and muffing herself in the folds of the cloak.

Thus habited, she thought she should have the best chance of making her way unnoticed, as some ordinary rural body, some industrious village market-woman, whose business took her abroad late, to be ready for early market next day.

She stole down stairs, and let herself noiselessly out. The night was as calm and beautiful as the previous one had been tempestuous. The stars shone brightly and peacefully, and lighted her way over field and meadow, through woodland and coppice, by lane and hedgerow, with mild benignant ray. The air smelt fresh and pure, as it came freely and gratefully upon her burning cheek ; there was a sense of liberty—liberty of breathing—liberty of purpose—liberty of action—in this voluntary setting forth to gain for herself the tidings she craved, through the solitary night scene. She looked up into the starlit sky, thankful for this at least—that she was able to come forth unwatched, unnoted, and to proceed unobserved. She met no one ; at that still hour, in that quiet neighbourhood, no soul save herself was stirring.

After a full hour's walking, she reached the hamlet. It con-

sisted of a few straggling cottages, on the borders of a patch of common, where the golden furze lay thick, intersected by irregular sheep-paths, and slender winding tracks. Kate knew the hamlet well, having passed it in many of her former rides, often remarking its picturesque beauty, and secluded situation.

She had taken care to ascertain the precise cottage to which Fermor Worthington had been carried; and now went straight towards it, knocking with her closed hand against the rude door, distinctly, but with a certain restraint, lest she should disturb him who lay within. Presently an old woman's head appeared at the lattice

"Who be there? What dost want?"

"Dame Grayfield?"

"Ay, I be she; what d'ee want?"

"Come here, please; I want to speak with you, dame."

"Well, what is it?" said Dame Grayfield, appearing at the door. "This be a strange time o' night, it be, to disturb Christ'n folks, and I that ha' got a gentry to nuss, too!"

"I will not keep you two minutes; I would not have come at this late hour, but that I have none other when I can get away," said Kate. "That sick gentleman you have to nurse—it is of him I would ask; he has been a good friend to me, and I want to know how he is."

"He's bad as bad can be; that's what he is," answered Dame Grayfield. "Doctor says he must be kept main quiet; and main quiet I keep him."

"Might I see him? Do you think you could let me see him? If I were to creep in softly, and not breathe to disturb him—would you let me look upon him?" said Kate.

"Well, I don't know; doctor says he's to be kept main quiet, and to see no one," said the dame.

"He will not see me—I will keep out of sight; but let me see him," urged Kate.

"What makes you so set on't?" was the reply.

"He has been very kind to me—been my best friend—helped me in my distress—served me beyond common help," faltered Kate, as she thought how truly she spoke.

"Ay, I hear he's done a world o' good, one way or t'other," said the dame. "All the poor have a good word for 'Squire Worthington. He's sparing to his tenants, thoughtful to them as needs help; and does many a kindness unknownst, they tell me. When a man's down, one hears the good of him, if there is any to be spoken and surely all the bad, if there's bad can be said about him. Mayhaps he's behaved kind by you, my woman, and nobody's none the wiser, eh? Mayhap he's helped you with a guinea or two, at odd times, when times were hard!"

"With more than guineas," said Kate.

"Well to be sure! Pound-notes, perhaps? But come you're a grateful body, and won't do him no hurt, by looking at him, and satisfying your own eyes how he's gettin' on; so come with me. Tread soft, and speak low."

She led the way into the little sleeping-chamber. Upon the low pallet-bed lay Fermor Worthington. His eyes were closed; his face colourless: his arm bandaged,—the surgeon having bled him profusely—his breathing nearly extinct, and his whole appearance bearing as near a resemblance to death as to life.

Kate leaned against the door-way, with her eyes fixed upon him, and her face blanched to a hue hardly different to his; while the old woman whispered: "Poor gentleman! He won't see you—no need to fear—he won't know as any one's nigh. He don't notice me; he ha'n't opened his eyes, scarce, since here he's been. It's thought his horse was scared by the lightning, and throwed him; and that his head was hurted in the fall; for doctor says, fever's come on, and if he ben't kept quiet, it'll go hard with him, for all he's young and strong. Poor soul! it's at such times as these, that the young and the strong, the old and the weak, the rich man and the working man, the gentry and the labourer, fare and fare alike, and bide their time to thrive or to fall, to recover or to die, as God wills. He don't look much different from any other sick body, now do he? He might be a poor mason as had fell from a house-top,—or he might be Squire Worthington of Worthington Court, whichever, and nobody guess the odds, as he lies there at this minute, bid'n' his

time to live or die, mightn't he? That's one comfort for us poor folks. Gentries don't look much different from us, when they're laid on their sick beds; nor they don't stand a better chance to win through with it, and get well again, than we do."

"But he will win through it—he will get well?" asked Kate, eagerly. "The doctor thinks he will recover, does he not?"

"Oh ay, doctors always thinks folks 'll recover, if there's no reason why their friends should be frightened, and made to think 'em worse than they are," answered Dame Grayfield. "Doctor said he'd likely do well enough if he was taken care on, and kept quiet, and well nussed; and I'll nuss him well, I promise you. Doctor says I shall be handsomely paid for my trouble, and my houseroom; and more nor that, I'd nuss him well, and try to bring him round, if 'twas only for the sake of what I hear he's been to the poor when he was up and about. It won't do, to have such a good friend to us, lost for want of a little good nussing."

How Kate Ireton longed that she herself could have stayed to nurse Fermor Worthington! How, at that instant, she wished he had been indeed her brother, that she might have remained to tend him with a sister's care! She half resolved she would brave all—assert her cousin's right to stay and watch her kinsman, and remain by his side to attend him, to minister to him, and think for him, to wait upon him, to perform the thousand services which affection prompts for the better alleviation and restoring of the beloved patient. She felt as if she better than any one, could understand how to render offices which should serve to mitigate pain and suffering, to foster recovery, and win back health and strength. Yet then Kate's self-doubt returned, and suggested the question, why should she believe herself best fitted to yield these services; why assume that she could perform the part of a nurse better than one in whose hands the doctor had been content to leave the office; why seek to appropriate a charge which had already been confided to another, deemed competent. Kate Ireton, in her period of moral discipline, and severe introspection, had learned to entertain many a modest misgiving and timid mistrust of her own ability—either to please, or to do well.

With a few words of grateful thanks to Dame Grayfield for permitting her to see him she called her benefactor, and earnestly commending him to the old woman's best and kindest care, Kate took her way back to her cottage home.

CHAPTER XLIX.

By several open and direct means, likewise, Kate's perpetual longing to know how Fermor progressed was satisfied. Ruth Field, knowing how eager she would naturally be to hear of her cousin's state, after the news of his accident had reached them, gleaned all the intelligence she could, concerning him, from the school children who came from the neighbourhood of the hamlet.

Ben Dimble, also, on learning what had befallen Mr. Worthington, made it his frequent business to go over and enquire how he was, and bring round the report to the school-cottage.

Once he brought the welcome tidings that Mr. Worthington was better; that the fever had taken a turn; that he had opened his eyes, recognized that he was in a strange place and among strange people, and had expressed a desire to be taken to his own house.

But that the doctor, when he heard this, had peremptorily forbidden any such removal, as likely to be attended with dangerous consequences; and that soon after, Mr. Worthington had had a relapse of fever which had proved how unequal he was to bear the slightest attempt of the kind.

She heard that he wandered; was restless; and complained much of the closeness and confinement of the room in which he lay,—saying he felt stifled, stifled.

"And I dare say he does, poor gentleman, feel the difference 'twixt the space and comfort of his own large airy rooms, and that little low-raftered place in yonder hut, Miss Kate;" said Ben. "To such as know what 'tis to want a roof at all, such a place

must seem comfortable enough; but to him, poor gentleman, that's been used all his life to luxury and grandeur, with plenty o' breathing space, I shouldn't wonder it seems little better than a rat-hole."

The image of Fermor thirsting for air,—for fresher, freer atmosphere—haunted Kate. She could think of nothing else. She understood so entirely the sensation. She could so thoroughly sympathize with the panting desire for pure, open, clear air, as a renovation to the spirit, invigoration to the frame. And if to one in health and activity such breathing-space were a pressing want, how doubly and trebly must it be necessary to the fevered sufferer.

She could not resist the intense longing she felt, to be the means of procuring him this vital need; and that night, again wrapping herself closely in Matty's hat and cloak, she set forth upon her ministering errand.

A speech of Fermor's that she had once heard him make, came into her mind as she speeded on. She recollected how he had always delightedly dwelt on the grateful odour of woodbine. She remembered his words, as a boy, when she had been struck by such a burst of enthusiasm about a mere flower, from one of his nature, upon his exclaiming:—"A whole atmosphere of content and refreshment lies in the smell of honeysuckle—to my sense, at least!" She remembered how fondly associated it was in his mind, with home feelings, and home comforts and enjoyments; and she resolved that since he could not now be transported to his home, he should have something of that home's luxurious and refined gratification brought to him. She pleased herself with the thought that some particle of the content and refreshment he had spoken of might subtly address itself to his senses even through the excitement and inapprehensiveness of fever.

Full of this hope, she made her way round by Worthington Court; crossed the park; stole up to the terrace; gathered a large handful of the rich, dew-laden blossoms; and then retraced her way with her treasure.

Arrive^d at Dame Grayfield's, Kate found the old woman some

what cross, at being disturbed out of a comfortable nap, into which she had recently fallen. But on seeing who it was, the dame graciously admitted her; saying, she knew it was her only time to come, and that she could make allowance, knowing herself what it was not to have a minute o' time one could call one's own, for what ought to be done.

She took the opportunity of Kate's being there to watch the sick man, that she might set in order one or two of her kitchen arrangements, which had been of late neglected for her nursing duties; bidding Kate go in by herself this time, since she had shown before she could keep still, and might judge with her own eyes how he was looking.

"He's quiet enough now; but he's been sadly ramblin' and wand'rin' all day. He's fallen into a dog-sleep to-night; so mind how you move about; I wouldn't have him waked for ever so much! He's least trouble when he's dozin'; and more nor that, Doctor said if he could get a fine long, sound sleep, it might do him all the good in the world, and be the beginnin' of his gettin' well."

Kate crept into the room, as though she had been shod with velvet.

Now she could look upon him with perfect unrestraint. Now, unwitnessed, she could allow her whole soul to pour forth its overflowing tide of affection through her eyes, as they rested passionately upon his countenance. Now, she might peruse his features, and note them to her heart's content, with such full liberty as never yet had been hers. Now, while she scanned the effect which illness had wrought, and anxiously traced its sad vestiges, she might satisfy the yearning to gaze with unrestricted freedom upon Fermor's face, owing to herself the while, that she loved it,—that she loved him. The more that she promised herself never again to look upon it thus,—the more that she enjoined herself never again to indulge in such rapturous tenderness of gaze,—the less did she now scruple to allow herself the momentary transport of beholding him at perfect ease, in perfect unreserve.

And now, she perceived how flushed and fevered he was; how

all the wanness and pallor were gone ; and how they were replaced by a bright hectic colour upon cheek and brow. She put back the scattered hair ; she arranged the pillow smoothly and coolly about the heated face ; she felt the burning hands, and placed them more easily upon the straightened coverlet.

Then she went to the lattice ; and disposing the curtain in such a way that it should screen off the immediate current, she opened the casement so as to admit sufficient of the outer air, to create a circulation in the small, close-pent chamber. She then poured out water from the ewer ; and arranged the honey-suckles in a glass upon the mantel-shelf ; and then once more she went to the bedside, to watch the sleeper until Dame Grayfield should return.

He turned restlessly, and uttered a slight moan ; then,—after a pause,—a heavy sigh.

This sound, coming from one whom she had always known of so quiet, unperturbed, and undemonstrative a demeanour, inexpressibly affected Kate Ireton.

She bent over him ; she nearly touched his hot cheek with her own cool one—fresh from the pure open air ; she again passed her soft hands lightly upon his burning temples, and once more drew aside the masses of disordered hair. A fleeting smile crossed the parched lips, as though a sense of relief and contentment reached the sleeper.

She breathed a fervent prayer that this slumber might be the herald of recovery ; and not long after, the old dame returned, thanking Kate for having taken her post in the interim. She little thought how profoundly that gratitude was felt by her whom she addressed ; as with quiet, kindly words, Kate bade her good-night, and returned home.

As morning dawned, Fermor Worthington awoke out of a deep sleep which had lasted some hours. He felt able to collect his thoughts more sanely and more composedly than he had yet

done since his accident ; but the thoughts themselves were all confused and dim,—the flitting visionary impressions of fever and wandering delirium.

He seemed to have been aware of some one in his room, other than his nurse. But who it was, he could form no idea. He could distinctly define its figure, but that figure conveyed no individual impersonation. He imagined he had seen a woman in a red cloak, standing at the window, and arranging something before it ; some drapery, or hanging, that she seemed to be disposing so as to exclude the rays of the moon, which he thought poured into the chamber. Then he fancied he had seen this same figure stationed with its back towards him, placing some flowers, —honey-suckles, as it seemed to him,—in water, upon the mantel shelf ; and that he had observed a pair of white, delicate hands, protruding from the coarse market-cloak, which seemed strangely contradictory and perplexing.

Then he seemed to have dreamed,—in the odd bewildering of identity with which such dreams abound,—that he was at Heathcote Hall ; that he was sitting in the 'Squire's arm-chair ; that he was the 'Squire himself, and that he saw his niece, Kate Iretton, bending over him, and that he felt her soft cool hands hovering about him, near to his forehead, but that they were somehow associated with the white hands belonging to the figure of the woman in the red cloak ; that he had felt the wavy hair sweeping over his face, and the balmy breath mingled with the fragrance of the honey-suckles, playing across his lips ; and he thought that he repeated (in his person, as it were) those words he had so often heard the 'Squire say :—" Give me a kiss, and have your own way ! " And then that vision had faded—the long, shining hair had vanished—the perfume was gone—the soft hands withdrawn—and in their stead, nothing remained but the strange figure in the red cloak.

That still dwelt so palpably with him,—before him,—that he turned to ask his nurse, who sat there at his bedside, whether she did not see the figure also ; but in the act of moving he lost sight of it, and knew that it was a vision like the rest.

Yet still it returned, vividly, distinctly, more positively and substantially than aught else. He could not help, at last, asking Dame Grayfield whether any one had been in the room beside herself.

"Was there not a neighbour,—some woman,—who came and helped you with your sick watch last night, dame?" he said.

"You saw her, then?" was the answer. "I bade her not disturb you."

"She did not disturb me,—she made no noise,—she glided about like an apparition,—I thought she had been one. But you say it was a real person; who was it?"

"Nay, I don't know; she don't live hereabouts,—she's no neighbour. She's some poor woman, that your honor, it seems, has been kind to. She said you had been her benefactor, her friend,—her best friend, she said. She seems a grateful body, and wanted to know how your honour got on in your fever; for she said you had helped her in her distress, —'with more than common help,' was her word."

"Did she stay long?"

"Well, I didn't notice in *partie'l'r*. But she staid long enough to show she don't know how to nuss, with all her good will to your honour. What did she do, but set open the window while my back was turned. Enough to give a sick man his death o' cold! Then she must needs fig out the mantel-shelf with a parcel o' honey-suckle blossoms; as if any child didn't know that cut flowers in a sick-room's little better than p'ison. But I chuck-ed 'em away, pretty quick, minute I spied 'em."

"She brought honey-suckles?"

"Ay, did she; but I wasn't a goin' to let 'em bide where she stuck 'em. I marched 'em out o' the room, afore they could do your honour any harm."

"They would have done me no harm—I like them; I wish you had let them remain, since she brought them for me. Who could she be? What sort of person was she?"

"Oh, I don't know; a commonish sort of a body, enough."

"Had she rich brown hair?" said Fermor, his thoughts wandering to the other blended vision.

"Lauk, no! No hair at all."

"Young?"

"Young! no, I shouldn't say as how she was. Young gals seldom dresses in that sort of hunchy-bunchy, muffy kind o' way. She'd got a common red cloak on, and a tie down black hat. Quite a plain, good sort o' body, as you may say."

Fermor turned round feverishly and fretfully, with his face away from the mumping toothless nurse. Her voice grated upon his ear. "A plain sort of body—red cloak—black hat," he muttered. "Ah, yes; some of my worthy tenants. Goody Johnson, perhaps. Ay, the honeysuckles! Goody Johnson, to be sure: Goody Johnson."

CHAPTER L.

Not many days after this, Lucy Chalkby came to bring Ruth the paper, and to chat over the news of the neighbourhood. Among other reports, she mentioned having heard that poor Mr. Worthington, who had had the bad accident and fever, and been laid up, at Dame Grayfield's, was pronounced sufficiently recovered to be removed to his own house. But though modest little Lucy Chalkby chatted on, and tried her best to be good company, she looked tearful and troubled, and as if she had something on her timid little mind, that was dying to flutter itself out in confidential communication to her two good friends the school-mistresses.

"What is the matter, Lucy?" inquired Kate, at length, seeing that she wanted encouragement to speak. "Has anything happened to grieve you? Have you been vexed?"

"Not vexed; only miserable."

"Only miserable! Is not that enough? Is it not worse than being vexed?"

"Well perhaps it is," sighed Lucy. "At any rate, it's very hard to bear. Oh, I wish there was no such thing as marrying!

At least, I wish father wouldn't think about having me married. Or if he will think about it, I wish he wouldn't have such a fancy for having me married to somebody worthy of me, as he calls it."

"Why, you wouldn't wish to be married to any one unworthy of you, would you, Lucy?" asked Ruth, with her quiet smile.

"Oh no, of course not! But still, what I think worthy, and what father thinks worthy, is so different. He has such a notion of what he calls intellectual people. He says that I, having been brought up among the Arts all my life, ought to have an ambition above sitting down contented with an unintellectual or unartistic person for a husband. But I don't care for artistic and intellectual people—they worry me. Why, now, there's father, he's an intellectual man; but he sadly—well, I won't say worries me—but he torments me to death with his intellectuality. And after all, what is there so very intellectual in selling Berlin wools, and patterns and picture-frames? If he sells prints, too, why, it don't make him an engraver, or an artist, does it? But he says he knows an artist who he's sure would have me, if I'd only say the word. 'Would have me!' As if I wanted to be had! Especially by any artistic or intellectual person. I loathe the very name of them, I hear so much of them. They're such a set of owls—that is, for husbands!"

"I fancy, Lucy, there is some particular person, not precisely remarkable for intellectual or artistic attainments, who has caused this violent objection of yours against those so distinguished," laughed Kate. "Is it not so?"

"Well, he's certainly not what would be called an intellectual person, like father, or by father; but he's no fool," replied Lucy, hastily and earnestly.

"Who's no fool, Lucy?" returned Kate, quietly.

"Why, Miles Oatland," answered Lucy. Then recollecting herself, she added, blushing and dimpling through the tears which her diatribe against intellectual people, and the dread of being forced into having one of them for a husband, had called forth, Ah! you've caught me! But I'm not ashamed of own

ing my love for Miles. He loves me. We've loved each other from children; and I'll never have any husband, if I don't have him; and he'll never have any wife, if not me. I always thought father meant me to have him. And so I really think he would, if he hadn't got this ridiculous idea into his head of my marrying an intellectual person. I detest intellectual people! They're so stupid, so dull, so absurd."

"And Miles Oatland is, of course, neither stupid, dull, nor absurd?" smiled Kate.

"What, Miles? Oh, the very reverse! He is all life and spirit; so clever, so accomplished. Why, he's the best swimmer in the county; he hasn't his match at cricket; he's a fine wrestler; and could beat any two Englishmen, or any half-dozen Frenchmen, at single-stick. And then, he's so—so—but that don't matter, to be sure."

"So what?" said Kate.

"Oh, nothing; it's of no consequence compared with the rest, certainly."

"Well, if it's nothing—if it's of no consequence, let us hear what this trifle is, in addition to his other qualifications. Besides, then, being so gifted in manly accomplishments, it seems that Miles Oatland is so—so——"

"So handsome! Oh, so handsome!" said Lucy. "He's such a fine manly-looking fellow, and so brave; and so—so——"

"What, more unspeakable sos, Lucy?" laughed Kate.

"Yes; he's so—very fond of me," blushed Lucy.

"And you're so—so—very fond of him, eh, Lucy?" returned Kate.

"Well, yes—we love each other dearly; and if I'm to give up Miles Oatland for some dolt of an intellectual person, I'll go mad, or throw myself out of the window, or do some desperate thing or other. And if Miles is to lose me, he swears he'll drown himself."

"Being such an excellent swimmer, he might have some difficulty in doing that. However, we must have no rash attempts

upon his life. We must see if we can't mollify your father ; not only induce him to give up his ambitious ideas of seeing you matched to intellect, which you disdain, but try if we can't persuade him into letting you marry the man you love, who's only a brave, handsome, manly fellow, well skilled in cricket, single-stick, swimming, and wrestling."

"And farming," said Lucy. "Miles Oatland is an excellent farmer, like his father before him. He's no mere idler ; but a steady, industrious, high-principled young man."

"Now, indeed, you have told me of qualifications which ought to have weight with your father. Have patience, dear Lucy, and all will—all must—go well. But chiefly, be sure you prevail with your lover to have patience."

"Ah, there's the difficulty !" sighed Lucy. "Miles is so afraid of father's carrying his point, and marrying me against my will to his favourite stick of an artist (I dare say he's some wretched dauber, some nobody, some fright with a moustache and bushy beard, as ugly as sin, who thinks himself a second Titian—on the strength of his own hair, instead of his camel-hair), that he wants to persuade me to run away, and get safe married to him, and trust to fate that father will forgive us, when all's done and can't be undone."

"No, no," said Kate, "you must not think of any such wild proceedings. Neither drowning nor eloping. Promise me that you will not think of running away, Lucy, or doing anything that shall grieve your father. But meantime try and pacify Miles Oatland ; induce him to wait hopefully, and trust to your constancy and steadfastness, while you endeavour to wean your father from his fancy for an artistic or intellectual son-in-law, by showing him that you desire a man of plain good sense, and honest practical industry, for a husband ; who, although he may neither wear a moustache, nor paint, nor write a book, wants for neither skill nor intelligence."

"If I could only see Miles, I might perhaps be able to persuade him to patience," cried Lucy. "But father keeps me so close within doors, and so closely watched, that I scarcely

ever now have an opportunity of speaking to Miles. And he's so quick-tempered and hasty, that I dread his doing something violent, if he should hear anything that should make him think father was carrying his point, before I can tell him I mean to be faithful to him and him only." And poor little timid Lucy Chalkby wrung her hands and wept.

Ruth Field was calming and consoling her, when Ben Dimble appeared. He came to bring Kate word of what he had heard concerning Mr. Worthington's being so far better, as to admit of his being taken home to Worthington Court.

While he was telling her this, Lucy Chalkby took leave, saying her father would miss her if she stayed out too long, and be displeased with her. As she passed out at the porch, Kate nodded cheerfully to her, and bade her be sure and keep up her spirits, and hope for the best; and with an April face, she went away.

"It goes to one's heart to see a woman in tears," said Ben Dimble; "but there are a few faces in the world that look somehow the sweeter for being washed with that sort o' dew. Lucy Chalkby's pretty face is one of 'em. It can bear the look o' crying without spoiling its beauty."

Ben did not venture to raise his eyes towards the face he was thinking of whilst he said this, as one of those few that looked only the lovelier for weeping and sorrow, or he would have seen Ruth's usually pale cheek take a heightened tint.

"Lucy Chalkby is certainly very pretty, and a gentle, diffident, modest girl; but I think she, like the rest of us, is hardly the better looking for swollen eyes, quivering lips, and tear-stained cheeks," smiled Kate. "I shall hope to see her, one day, her old dimple-mouthed, mild-eyed, brightly-blushing self again; and, depend on it, she will be the prettier for the change."

"P'rhaps the prettier; but there's something beyond prettiness, to my thinking, Miss Kate, in a sad look upon a woman's face. It makes a chap feel more kindly, more respectfully towards her. It makes him want to be of some use—some ser

vice to her, like. When she's rosy, and bright, and happy-looking, she seems as if she could do without you—as if she didn't want you; but when she's downcast, and crying, she looks as though she asked, without speaking, for some comfort, some help, that p'rhaps you might be able to give her."

"At that rate, Ben, you would have women unhappy, that you might have the pleasure of doing what you could to comfort them?" said Kate.

"Not at all, Miss Kate. If I had my will, no woman should ever know a moment's fretting; but as there must be misery in the world—for some good cause that God knows, though I don't—I could wish to do what lay in my poor power to comfort 'em, when I see 'em sorrowful. It's a foolish thought, but it's mine."

"None so foolish, Ben, for it's a kind one," replied Kate. "Only the brutal and the hard confound kindness with folly, goodness with silliness, gentle-heartedness with weakness. To second your kindly desire of consoling the unhappy, I will give you a few lines to carry for me to Lucy Chalkby. I have thought of something, since she has been gone, which I omitted to say to her, and which, I think, will help her to keep up her spirits hopefully and cheerfully. Will you call there, in your way back, and give my letter into her own hands, Ben?"

"I am going to Mr. Chalkby's myself: I am obliged to go there and choose some slates and copy-books that we want for the children," said Ruth. "I can take your letter to Lucy."

"So do, Ruth; and as Mr. Chalkby's shop lies all in Ben's way home, he will see you safe there; will you not, Ben?" said Kate.

"If she—if you, Ruth, don't mind," he faltered, as he looked towards her.

"Not at all," she said, quietly. And Kate's few words being written, Ben and Ruth left the cottage together. They went out at the porch, and Ben stepped on to the little wicket-gate, and held it open for Ruth Field to pass through, as if she had been a sovereign queen and he her reverential subject. He made no proffer of his arm, but walked close beside her, ready to support her in case of need.

"You forget that I am still lame; may I take your arm?" she said, in her low soft voice.

"May you, Ruth!" was all his answer, as he gave it with an eagerness that seemed to put his whole heart in the gesture.

"I hardly wonder you should cease to remember my lameness, it is so much better than it was," said Ruth, with a tone of placid cheerfulness. "I walk quite strongly to what I used, thanks to our kind friend, Miss Ireton, and her gentle, generous care and consideration for me. She has been to me like one of God's saints, exalted, beneficent, gracious; as though it were her nature to be benign, nothing of condescension or patronage ever appearing in her manner. She has *acted* by me as a superior being; she has *treated* me as an equal; she is, to my thought, the first, the noblest, of human creatures—the nearest to perfection that mortal can be."

"I don't wonder at your saying this, Ruth; it's what she must seem to you. To me she's much the same. I look up to her, for what she's been to—to—us all. She stood my friend with the good 'Squire, her uncle, when I was dull, and desperate, and slovened my work, and was hardly my own man; and when, if it hadn't been for Miss Kate, I should ha' got turned away in disgrace, as a careless, good-for-nothing, ungrateful dog. But she got me leave to stay; and I did my best to show I wasn't careless, far less ungrateful. I was only out o' heart; and that I've contrived to go on being, without letting it keep me from working with a heart."

"Here we are at Mr. Chalkby's, Ben. Thank you for seeing me to the door."

"Shall I go in with you, and wait while you do your errand, Ruth?" he said.

"In order to bear your share in carrying Lucy comfort?" smiled Ruth, with the same slight colour coming into her pale cheeks. "Are you willing to see whether the tears are all gone, and whether the face bears composure as well as it does weeping and crying?"

"I haven't the least care to look at it again, either sad or smiling," said Ben. "It's a pretty, innocent face, that's all."

"All!" said Ruth, to herself, as she went into Mr. Chalkby's shop.

When she came forth again, she found Ben still there, waiting for her outside.

"You still here!" she said, in surprise.

"Yes; I didn't know but you might be glad of an arm home, and was only too glad to stay, in case."

"You are very good—very thoughtful," said Ruth.

"Good?—'Thoughtful?' Thinking of myself, you mean?"

"Indeed, *I* mean no such thing. It is impossible for you to be selfish, Ben. You fancied I might feel lame and tired, and so waited to give me your support. To show you how strong I am, I will walk with you part of your way home, just across the two first fields. The evening is so fine, it will be of service to me; it will be a pleasure—a holiday to me."

"Ruth, it is you, now, who are 'good' to me—too good—if——" he stopped short.

Ruth held her peace, that he might finish his sentence if he would, but finding he remained silent, she said: "Ben, we shall hope, the first time you hear anything farther of how Mr. Worthington is going on, that you'll find time to come over and tell us. Miss Ireton is naturally very anxious about her cousin. He is her only relation—seemingly her only friend, and it speaks well for his nobleness of character, that, when she lost her fortune and her station, he should still remain as intimate with her as ever. He is a perfect gentleman in heart and mind, as well as in person and manner. He behaves with such unaffected consideration, with so much unobtrusive kindness and attention, that he is a model of a good friend and cousin. I rejoice that she has such a friend."

"She deserves the best o' friends herself, being so good a friend to others," answered Ben. "Be sure I shall lose no chance of coming over as soon as I can, to bring news of Mr. Worthington to say nothing of coming to please myself."

"You are resolved to make it out that you are a very selfish person, Ben," smiled Ruth. "When, on the contrary, Miss Ire-

ton—who ought to be a far better judge,—often assures me you are the most obliging, kind-hearted Ben in the world.”

“God bless her for that!” said Ben; “though it’s only her kind wish to make the best of me.”

Just then, Ruth Field caught sight of a young man crossing a stile, at the opposite side of the field in which they were.

“Oh, call to him, Ben! Shout! I sha’n’t be able to make him hear! You call him for me! Call loud, or he’ll be gone,” she said eagerly.

“Who is he? What name must I call?” asked Ben.

“Miles Oatland,” she answered.

The name was shouted out in Ben Dimble’s loudest key.

As the person turned, and came towards them, showing, as he advanced, the figure of a tall, athletic, well-made, well-featured young man, Ruth Field said earnestly:—“Ben, good-bye. I will go back with Miles; he will see me home. I want to speak to him; to say a few words to him. Good-bye, Ben.”

“Who is this Miles Oatland?” asked Ben. “I think I’ve heard of him. A young farmer, isn’t he?”

“Yes; he’s a neighbour of ours; his two little sisters—much younger than he—half-sisters, indeed, come to our school,” said Ruth. “But he is here; once more, good bye, Ben.”

When Miles Oatland joined Ruth Field, she told him all concerning Lucy Chalkby; entreated him to wait patiently, have confidence in her resolve to preserve her faith for him, and to take hope from Miss Ireton’s and her own endeavours to do all they could towards effecting a change in Mr. Chalkby’s designs for his daughter’s bestowal. She told him she believed Miss Ireton intended herself trying to persuade Lucy’s father to hear reason; that she had written this evening to Lucy, to tell her so; but that she thought of waiting for a favourable opportunity of introducing her appeal; and that, above all, they besought Miles himself to trust them with the conduct of the affair, and to forbear from all rash or hasty measures. Miles Oatland promised fairly; only conjuring Ruth, if possible, to obtain him an interview soon with his Lucy, from which he might gather courage and patience

At the cottage porch they parted; and when Ruth entered the little parlour, Kate received her with a playful enquiry, why she had loitered so long on her errand to Mr. Chalkby's.

"I extended my walk; the evening was so tempting, I accompanied Ben part of his way home," replied Ruth, colouring.

"And Ben, in common civility, could do no less than return and see you back again; eh, Ruthy?"

"It was not Ben who saw me home," answered Ruth.

"Who then? I thought I saw a tall young man bring you to the door,—just Ben's height and figure," said Kate.

"It was Lucy Chalkby's handsome lover," said Ruth. "She might well admire him. He has a fine, manly person; and a good ingenuous face. But he is not better looking than—not so handsome—as—as—others," concluded Ruth.

"‘Others’ meaning ‘Ben,’" thought Kate to herself. "Aha, Ruthy! Is it so? Your heart is becoming sufficiently free, to let your eyes use their judgment, is it? Let it have time; let it have time; and it will yet do poor Ben full justice."



CHAPTER LI.

THERE was one of Ruth Field's little scholars, that had taken a vehement fancy to her. It was a pretty, fair-haired darling—somewhat unruly and headstrong,—the only child of Richard Bligh, a wheelwright, who had been left a young widower, with this little creature hardly more than of infantine years. It still required a mother's care; and gentle Ruth had yielded it all the fondling attention, and tender thoughtful heed, which the motherless babe had seemed to demand of her, when thrown into her protection, by being sent to school where she was sub-monitress. It was a lively, bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked, chubby bantling, full of health, and spirit and noisy vivacity. It was often almost too much for her, in its ceaseless demands upon her strength and

cheerfulness—she, so fragile and so quiet; but Ruth felt that it was, in a manner, peculiarly committed to her, by its father's and its own bereft condition, and the especial liking it had conceived towards herself. Little Jessy would mind no one so implicitly as Ruth Field; and showed affection for few else. With others she was fractious, troublesome, restless, mischievous; with Ruth she was docile, tractable, loving, happy. She would nestle near her, hang upon her skirts, and seek to be taken upon her lap, or borne in her arms, the livelong day. She was always hovering about Ruth, and coaxing to be held by her. She was still young enough to like to be nursed, and petted; to have many of her baby ways still; to prefer being seated on a knee, rather than sitting on a form or a chair; and to feel much more willing to be carried than to walk. But though she was such a child in years, and ways, she was bigger in bulk and weight than poor weakly Ruth could well manage, without considerable difficulty; and her kindliness towards the little creature was perpetually at issue with her power.

One day, Ben Dimble,—on his way to bring Miss Kate news—he had heard of her cousin's having been so much better, as to have left his room that morning,—met Ruth Field, taking home Jessy Bligh to her father's cottage. The little one had been unusually obstreperous, and peremptory in her demands to be carried; and Ruth was bending beneath her dumpling weight, when Ben came up.

Seeing her thus burdened, he hastened to relieve her; but Jessy kicked, and struggled, and screamed, vowing she would not leave her dear, pretty Ruthy, that she wouldn't! However, Ben was not to be foiled in his determination to see Ruth freed from her charge, and took the child from her, in spite of its desperate resistance.

"You're a bad ugly man! A naughty, frightful, hateful ogre!" roared Jessy, pushing his face from her, while she thump-cl and tore at it with all the force of her angry little hands.

How dare you take me from my dear, beautiful Ruthy, my own kind Ruthy! How dare you?"

"If you love your Ruthy, you wouldn't surely wish to hurt

her; and you do hurt her. You're too heavy for her, you pain her arms, you make her back ache, you weigh her down. You oughtn't to make her carry you."

"But I like her to carry me; I like her, and I don't like you! I hate you, you ugly, wicked, horrible monster. You're uglier than the great big ogre in the picture book, that's trying to dash out Jack's brains with the large club. Go away; set me down; give me back to Ruthy. She has a pretty, white, gentle face; and you've a nasty, frightful, red one; I hate it, I hate you, you're so ugly."

"Jessy! Jessy!" said Ruth, admonishingly.

"Well, hasn't he a great, ugly, frightful face? So red like the ogre; such great eyes, like the ogre; such bright streaks of lips, just like the ogre. Isn't he hideous, just like the ogre! Look at him, Ruthy! Isn't he frightfully ugly?"

"Hold your tongue, you silly little goose!" said Ruth. "You don't know what you're talking of."

"She's no goose to think a white, gentle face, pretty," said Ben. "And so you think a pale face prettier than a rosy one, do you, little one? I'm quite of your way o' thinking. Tell me why you find it so much prettier."

"I shall tell you nothing, till you give me back to Ruthy, you bad, ugly man," said the enraged Jessy, vainly striving to break from the powerful arms that held her easily and closely.

"That I shall not; so make up your mind to keep still, and talk to me quietly."

"I sha'n't keep still, I sha'n't talk; I'll do nothing but kick you, and slap you, and pull your hair, and call you ugly, and,—and,—hate you;" retorted Jessy. "And I do hate you,—you're so strong, and so fierce, and such a horrible great hideous giant. Help me to call him names, and make him feel he's ugly and hateful, Ruthy."

"You little simpleton; is this your gratitude, when he's so kind as to carry you, and lift you comfortably, and bear you firmly and easily,—much better than I can, you silly child?" said Ruth.

"I don't ask him to carry,—I don't want him to carry me, I hate him, I detest him. Don't you, Ruthy? Help me to dislike him, and to make him feel that we wish him gone away."

Ben suddenly set the child down upon the ground. It ran to Ruth, clung to her skirts, tugged and dragged at her arm, and hung its whole weight about her, and teased to be taken up.

"No, that you shall not, you young tyrant!" said he, as he caught her up in his arms again, and held her fast, while the screaming and struggling re-commenced.

In this fashion they arrived at the wheelwright's; the child becoming pacified so soon as she was delivered over to her father—whom, next to Ruth Field, she loved.

"If you're not afraid to trust yourself with the ugly ogre, Ruth, will you let me walk back with you?" said Ben, diffidently.

"I'll take the ogre's arm," said Ruth.

"The very babies find out one's ungain," he said; "there's something unfortunate in some men; they can please no creatures but themselves like. Gentle women, pretty innocent children, all that their hearts are drawn to, find 'em hateful. Only the horses, poor brutes! find nothing to turn from in the awkward, ugly giant."

"You surely are not hurt at the foolish, ignorant speech of a child?" said Ruth, softly.

"I'm not hurt with her, but I'm hurt to think what she said's true," answered Ben. "It's too plain, there's something amiss about some men—they can't hope to be even bearable to those they'd lay down their lives to please. But this is complaining, cowardly kind of talk; not fit for one who's all courage and uncomplainingness herself. More shame for me, not to take better example! But sometimes, coming to see true how poor a fellow I am—what an unlucky, unhappy dog I am, in what I could most wish to be not so, makes me feel desperate, and break out into complaints that lower me more and more. Forgive me, Ruth! I've often sworn to myself I'd never torment you again with such words as these, after you, in your own kindly way, told me how

hopeless and useless they were ; but I'm a fool—a cowardly fool—and shall be to the day of my death, I fancy, in this one matter."

"In what matter, Ben?" asked Ruth, with a softly-fluttered look, very different from her usual quietude.

"Nay, don't be afraid ; I'm not going to pain your kind heart by speaking of it any more, Ruth," he returned. "You've more than once, in your own feeling, considerate way, let me know I mustn't think of it—hope for it: I must, at least, do my best to let you hear no more of it. And, now, here we are at the cottage. I'll just take Miss Kate the news about Mr. Worthington, and then I'll be off home."



CHAPTER LII.

THUS gradually prepared to see him again, and perpetually schooling herself to meet him with the cheerful, unconcerned air which should best conceal the profounder interest she had taken in his recent state, Kate was enabled to meet Fermor with a demeanour that effectually confirmed her intention, and his impression.

She was sprightly, yet kindly ; gaily affectionate, with a tone of playful, familiar intimacy ; precisely the manner which assorted with, and was the exponent of, that feeling she had towards him, besides the yet stronger one that lay cherished and latent within the secret recesses of her heart.

The beholding him again, the seeing him convalescent, helped to give her ease and animation ; while, upon him, the sight of her good spirits had an effect at once gladdening and depressing. He rejoiced to see her well—happy ; yet he himself had never felt less happy. It gave him delight to look upon her bright, pleased face ; yet, beneath all, there was a sense of regret, of poignant repining, which filled him with dejection and melancholy.

He did his best to repress this mood and succeeded so far as, with his usual power of preventing it from affecting his manner, to bear himself tranquilly, and with a certain responsive freedom and playfulness of speech.

He inquired of her school progress, of those among her young pupils in whom he knew she took an interest, of the advance in their vocal prowess, of the general improvement in their condition, moral and mental. He knew she thought as earnestly of education for temper and character as for intelligence; he knew that she was even more anxious to make them good than to make them clever; he knew that she as sedulously watched indications of character, and fostered germs of virtuous disposition, as she cultivated their faculties, or promoted their learning.

While he was there, Ruth came into the cottage-parlour, full of some tidings she had gathered of little Peggy Benson's unfortunate home-position. Finding that Miss Ireton and Mr. Worthington were upon the subject of the school and the school-children, she poured forth her account to Kate.

"It seems the child is really unhappy—very unhappy," she said. "Her mother has married again, her stepfather is a morose, brutal man, and little Peggy, between them, leads a miserable life. The child is neglected, or, worse still, often reproached or ill-treated. Her loving remembrance of her dead father makes her present existence the more sad and difficult to bear."

"And she is a child of so sensitive a nature, of so imaginative a temperament," said Kate, "that she feels it with peculiar keenness. Things that would scarcely affect an ordinary child, touch such a disposition as hers beyond belief. I wish we could withdraw her from so unfit a home."

"They are as anxious to get rid of her, I hear, as she is to be away," answered Ruth. "She told me just now, when I was cross-questioning her before she went home, that an aunt of hers—a sister of her father's—a dressmaker and milliner, is willing to take Peggy to live with her as an apprentice, if the step-father would pay five pounds' fee; but the man is selfish

and a drunkard, and refuses to spend so much upon his wife's worthless brat, he says."

"She would be well off—happy with her aunt, who is a sensible, good sort of woman, I know," said Kate, "and would treat the child kindly, and teach her her own business all in good time. Poor Peggy! I wish it could be managed for her. Ruth, you are going out; will you call upon Peggy's aunt, and try what can be done? Yet the poor milliner is herself not too rich, and has children of her own to support," she added, as Ruth was leaving the room; "I fear it cannot be. And five pounds would do this good—would take poor little Peg out of her unhappy home, and place her in a comfortable one! However, I have no five-pound notes, nor even one-pound notes, to dispose of, and so, I fear, it is useless thinking any more of Peggy's chance."

"You forget that if you have no five-pound notes, Kate, I have plenty," said Fermor, who had been turning over the leaves of a book while Ruth and she had been speaking together.

"True, I had forgotten," she said, "or, perhaps, I should not have uttered what I did before you. I should hardly have mentioned my lack of notes, had I remembered how you abound in them."

"Why will you not believe it is the same thing?" he said. "Why will you never let me have the pleasure of helping you, in what money may help?"

"Come," she replied, smilingly, "you shall not say I never do. Give me this five-pound note. I ask it in Peggy's name; to effect good for one who—in her genuine, innocent, childish way—has a most loving liking for you."

"Kate, you have given me great happiness," said Fermor, in his deep, expressive voice.

He took forth his pocket-book as he spoke. Kate was conscious of a certain disappointed feeling upon seeing it; but the next moment her feeling changed to an inexpressible sensation of content, as he drew from one of the folds the old "grum

brown " purse, tattered, and too worn for use, but still wrapped round money set apart for beneficent purposes. " You know this is your own, Kate," he said; " only use it as such, if you would make it yield me pleasure."

" I may one day make so large a demand upon it as shall startle you, cousin mine," she returned. " I have a project floating in my brain, which would take some few hundreds to effect. It is still in the clouds as yet; but if my hope be crowned by the event—it has for its object the dowering so excellent a girl, that I know you would think the sum well bestowed though it be a large one to give."

" I will not say, the larger the better; I will only say, whatever the sum—be it much or little—which will secure the fulfilment of any wish of yours, Kate, it shall be gladly forthcoming whenever you claim it. Make me your banker-cousin."

" Make a goodly iron safe of my Iron Cousin, and draw from it whatever hoards I may require for use. Truly, this is treating him with scant ceremony."

" Ceremony would be all that needed to mar our intercourse, Kate, and render it wholly unlike what it has ever been. The absence of ceremony is what has always served to palliate its roughness, the licence of familiarity making up for freedom of usage. Without ceremony, therefore—without scruple—apply to your banker-cousin for any sums you need. Your notes of hand shall not only be duly honoured, but will be received and esteemed as honours, all honouringly. He engages to honour your cheques, if you promise to honour him with them."

" Proffered with so frank and cordial a generosity, the contents of my iron safe cannot but be accepted. I shall certainly have recourse to it, whenever I feel that the objects I have in view are such as would have your wish as well as mine for their prosperous issue."

" But all your demands have the wants of others for their object. If you would really gratify me, Kate, ask something for yourself; something that *you* would like."

" I like what I have already asked money of you for. I es-

pecially enjoy the idea of Peggy's being established happily, and I should even still more rejoice in the accomplishment of my other view."

"But what I mean is, that I should like you to tell me of something which should procure you some peculiar gratification; something which should interest, please you,—you, your own self; just with such ingenuous freedom as you would have told your beloved uncle of anything his Kate desired. Give me—grant me this delight; I cannot say what delight it would be to me, to feel that you treated your cousin with no less confidence and unreserve of request, than you did him you loved as your true and disinterested friend,—your dearest friend upon earth."

"Well, then, shall I tell you something in which I am indeed most interested—upon which my heart is set?" she returned.

"Tell me, Kate," were the three words for which Fermor found voice.

"I do not think you are looking well—your fever has left you thin and pale." Kate found herself faltering; and she rallied into a lighter tone. "The boon I have to ask at your hands, as an especial favour to myself is, that you would seek health in change of air. I cannot have my best, my kindest friend, remain ill. I think if you were to try a month at the sea-side, you would greatly benefit by it. It would brace you—strengthen you—help you to throw off that lingering weakness and depression, which sit unnaturally upon the iron frame."

"You are anxious for my health?"

"As a Christian should be," smiled Kate. "I don't like to see a fellow-creature drooping for want of fresh air, and not advise him to go seek it."

"A fellow-creature!" But I thought, Kate, you did not like advice yourself?"

"Oh, I'm no rule for anybody, following no rule myself. But the Iron Cousin is always guided by right and reason, therefore——"

"Therefore he must go to the sea-side, whether he will or no! Whether he wish it or no?"

"To be sure. Most things right and reasonable are contrary to will and inclination. Do what you ought; and go, cousin mine."

"Do what I ought, and go!" mused Fermor Worthington, as he rode homeward. "Yes, I ought, and must. Less than ever can I master my own feelings; less than ever can I see her, and control my rebellious emotions, repress my unconquerable yearning that it were not forbidden me to wish, to hope. She herself begins to perceive that I ought to leave her, and sends me from her; gently, playfully, delicately, that I may not be hurt or offended. But still, decisively, that I may understand the necessity there is for ceasing to remain near her. Yes, go I ought and must; since there is no staying, without wreck of faith and honour."

In deep unhappiness, with a sense of misery more profound than any he had yet experienced, with even a despairing feeling, Fermor prepared to quit his home, and repair whither Kate had suggested. He little dreamed it was that she herself might also gather strength and bracing from the temporary separation. That she might gain fresh fortitude and composure, to bear his presence without self-betrayal; and that while he drew health of frame from the sea breezes, she might derive vigour of moral courage from absence, restraint, and denial. To fast from expecting or beholding him; to starve her senses from their delight in seeing and hearing him; to teach herself patience, and discipline herself into dispassionate coolness, was her aim, in proposing this separation, no less than anxiety for his complete recovery. She believed that when she should see him restored from that languor of illness which involuntarily made so powerful an appeal to her tenderness, she would be better able to maintain her indifference of behaviour, as well as guard her feelings from a too fond interest in his looks and air. She was extremely desirous that a period should elapse, which might allow her to recover from the effect of having seen him as she had—fevered, unconscious, scarcely living. She feared lest some inadvertent word, some casual expression, might betray her having then beheld him; and, upon all accounts, she

believed she had reason to rejoice that Fermor was gone away for a time.

But her old tedium and blank of existence returned upon her. Again she felt the dreariness, and aching sense of loss, and loneliness, and forlorn lack of sympathy. She bore up nobly against it; she roused all the spirited energy of her nature, to prevent its overwhelming her; but there were times when it beset her severely, and threatened to destroy courage, comfort, happiness.

From her active zeal in the discharge of her school duties, from her unfailing attention to her household occupations, from her kindly care of her old nurse, from her warmth of friendship and esteem for Ruth Field, from the interest she took in Ben's modest faithful attachment, from her concern for timid Lucy Chalkby, from all her unselfish sources of thought and employment, Kate Ireton derived best support. These supplied her with wholesome invigoration, when, had she supinely yielded to egotistical reflections, and indulged in morbid brooding, she might have sunk into useless apathy and feeble misery. She many times congratulated herself, that fate had necessitated occupation for her, which, with its stringent daily summons, imposed salutary exertion, and demanded healthy effort; and soon after an incident occurred which roused both interest and solicitude.

One Sunday evening Ruth Field had taken little Jessy Bligh out for a ramble to the river-side walk. It was a pretty tree-embowered spot, with a wooded slope on one side of the path, shelving down to the brink of the stream, while on the other, a turf bank, covered with wild flowers, brambles, and nut-boughs, formed a pleasant seat for those who chose to sit and rest.

Although on a week-day this place was very sequestered, yet on Sundays and holidays it was a favourite resort of the village lads and lasses. In spring, it afforded cowslips, violets and primroses; in blackberry and nutting season, it yielded abundant fruit. Here Ruth could sit and enjoy her book, while her restless, active young companion might play about to her heart's content.

The child had collected a lap-full of rose-campions, and store of fox-gloves, white and purple, with which she was coaxing Ruth to make Floral crown, sceptre, and regalia, for her little queen-ship's wear.

"String the ragged-robbins into a necklace for me, Ruthy! And twist me a garland of the purple fox-gloves; and this lily-white long one shall be my fairy-queen wand," she said. "Oh! do lay by that tiresome book, and attend to me!"

Ruth gave way to the young exacter, put away the volume, and began weaving the desired paraphernalia. When she had finished, and was decking Jessy out in the various ornaments, some fancied intention that she was going to take them off again, caused the child to spring away from beneath her hands, and scamper off at full speed.

In sudden alarm Ruth started up, calling to her to stop. "Jessy! Jessy! the river! Not that way! if you run on that way, you'll come to the edge and tumble in! Keep the path! keep the path!"

But the heedless little creature held on its mad-cap course, only hearing in Ruth's call a desire to cheek flight, and to overtake it.

A moment more, and there was a splash, a fall, and the child was out of sight. It had dropped headlong into the stream.

Ruth shrieked wildly for help, as she flew to the river's brink.

Some one dashed past her, and plunged in.

The next thing Ruth Field saw, was Ben Dimble struggling in the water, endeavouring to sustain the child with one arm, while with the other he seized an over-hanging bough that depended from the bank into the stream.

"Ruth," he said, "you can save her, if you seize her firmly. Lean cautiously over, keeping hold of the strongest part of the branch. Balance yourself well, and don't let go for your life. Then grasp her skirts, close, close!"

"But you! you!" she exclaimed, with her eyes fixed upon Ben, as she remembered that he could not swim, and that her weight might break the bough which was his only stay.

"No matter—for you, for your sake—it is no matter. Seize the child firmly, and save her!"

Ruth's extended hand trembled with desire to give its aid to him she seemed to see sinking before her eyes; but muttering, "It is my duty. *She* was confided to my care," she clutched at Jessy's dress, and with what remaining strength she had, dragged her to the brink. Then there came a crash, a confusion, and hurry; a mist and darkness swam before her eyes; a noise, as of many waters, rushed through her ears; her limbs failed; her senses reeled, forsook her; and she fell back upon the bank, exhausted.

By this time, many people had hurried to the spot, when, as the branch snapped beneath the effect of the heavy lading from which it was abruptly released, and Ben was sinking rapidly, a young man darted from the crowd, leaped in, and dragged him to shore.

The wheelwright, Richard Bligh, now came up, and hearing what had chanced, caught his child in his arms, where she soon returned to life and consciousness: but Ruth Field still remained in a strong swoon.

The neighbours crowded busily round, proffering help; some of them attending to Ben, and seeking to restore animation; while others were shaking hands with Miles Oatland, and congratulating him on having saved a man's life; and yet others were exclaiming with looks of pity, "The poor lame body has fainted!"

"It's the school-teacher; the sub-monitress," said one.

"Bear a hand, and let us carry her home," said another.

They bore her gently to the cottage, where Kate Ireton, with grief and dismay, received the senseless form of Ruth Field into her arms, after having parted with her but an hour ago in health and life."

Long she watched by her side, with no answering token of consciousness; and when at length Ruth open her eyes, it was with a vacant look. She spoke wandringly, and clutched nervously with her hand the while.

"I have her fast—fast. But him! him! He is sinking! Oh, for another hand! If I might but help him! For me—for

me, he is lost! I am his murderer! I was always his bane, his misery! I made him unhappy, now I cause his death!"

She shuddered, and a strong convulsion shook her frame. Then her feet sharply quivered, while the rest of her body lay stiff and motionless. Kate bent over her, whispering quiet, soothing words.

"He is saved, dear Ruth! He is safe, quite safe!"

"Safe?" she exclaimed. "It cannot be! I saw him disappear when the bough broke. I saw the waters close above his head. That was the last thing I saw, as I dropped."

The sharp, quivering shudder passed over her again, from head to foot.

"He sank, but he was rescued," whispered Kate. "Brave Miles Oatland, the good swimmer, the strong manly arm and heart, dashed in to his succour, and saved him. Ben is safe—well! Be well too, dear Ruth, for his sake—for mine. Comfort your heart with the thought that he is safe; and keep still, and at peace, while you get strength and safety yourself."

And Ruth Field could now keep still, and feel at peace, with this thought to muse upon. For very long she lay wrapped in a content so profound, that she seemed to sleep. But her spirit was awake to the full joy of finding that her faithful lover had not fallen a sacrifice to his honest generous devotion; and she was employing her whole soul in devout thanks for his preservation.



CHAPTER LIII.

NEXT day, Ruth Field was so well recovered as to be able to fulfill her school duties during the morning. In the afternoon, however, she asked Kate Ireton if she thought she could manage to let her absent herself during the rest of the lessons, and dispense with her assistance.

"I would not ask this, monitress," she said in her usual

sedate, simple way, "but that I have a duty to perform, which I think should not be deferred."

"And if it be the duty that I guess," said Kate, smilingly, "all I have to ask of you, Ruthy, is not to make it too much of a dry duty, but make it a pleasant one—as pleasant as you can—do you hear? Let it be performed as satisfactorily and as thoroughly as it ought to be. Do you mind, do you understand, Ruthy?" she added, with a smiling but affectionate earnestness, as she looked straight into Ruth Field's soft brown eyes, which were lowered at first, but afterwards were lifted towards hers with as open an expression as her own, full of a sweet and gentle meaning.

"Yes, I understand," said Ruth; "and I thank you for signifying how completely you understand me, in your own delicate, kindly way."

Ruth Field took the path across the meadows, leading in the direction of Huntley Lodge. She had gone more than half the distance, when she was met by Ben Dimble.

"This is too far for you to walk, Ruth," he said, as he eagerly advanced towards her. "You must be tired? You look flushed. Rest on this seat."

He assisted her to the low step of a stile near, and stood by her.

"What could bring you out so far—alone, too—no one to give you an arm?"

"I was coming to you, Ben," she said.

"To me!"

"To you; I could not rest until I thanked you for risking your life to save my little Jessy. She is a dear pretty creature, for all her unruliness; and I never should have forgiven myself, had any harm happened to her. She was committed to my care. I cannot thank you too heartily or too gratefully, Ben—dear Ben."

"You thank me a thousand times more than I deserve, in that one word, Ruth," he said. "What I did don't ought to have thanks by rights, since I couldn't help doing it. If I'd had the nap to do something that really deserved thanking, that little

word from you—to me, Ruth—would pay it over and over. Ever simply, straightforwardly said as 'tis, it's worth much to me. Just spoke out of the kind feeling of your grateful heart, Ruth, which bids you say as much as you can to show your thankfulness; even so far, it's precious to me."

"Believe that it is spoken in its fullest meaning, Ben," said Ruth, softly. "You must always be 'dear' to me, for having saved my little favourite."

"I only helped to save her; you did as much, or more, than I did; if you hadn't drawn her from the water, when I just bore her up, she must ha' been lost. Richard Bligh so well knows this, that he vows he'll offer himself, and all he has, if you'll only have him, and be a mother to his motherless child, who dotes on you, and whose life you've saved."

"I marry Richard Bligh! Not to save my own life!" exclaimed Ruth, with more vehemence than her wonted calm quietude betokened her capable of.

"He's rich; he'd maintain you like a lady, as you ought to be, Ruth," said Ben, moved to persist, he hardly knew why.

"I care not for him; I do not love him," she said.

"You love another?" said Ben.

Ruth's eyes fell.

"I understand; you still think of that——"

"Do not believe me capable of so mean, so degrading a weakness!" she exclaimed. "His image has long been effaced by his own base conduct."

"But you love? Oh, this is worse; you can love again, yet not—I see! Miles Oatland! He's a fine manly fellow; and you—Oh, Ruth!"

Ben covered his face with his hands. Ruth got up, and quietly displaced them. "Ben, look at me! Is there no one else, think you? Is there no one else, whose manly courage, and long, true-hearted fidelity, and tried patience and unselfishness, have at last won their way to my love. Have won it—secured it—made it his own for ever?"

He looked incredulously in her face—in her eyes. He read the truth there.

He snatched her in his arms, with wild, vehement kisses. "Ruth! Ruth! I can't believe my own good fortune! I'm obliged to prove to myself it's real."

"You take a good method," she said, with her soft smile, and soft colour. "Are you not yet convinced?" For Ben was still gathering proof, after his own peculiar fashion.

"Ruth! dear, dear Ruth! Oh, I thank God! I thank God, for a happiness I never thought would be mine."

"You were indeed hard to lead into belief," she said. "I had to speak very plainly, Ben, before I could make you understand that my own eyes were opened to the truth of what I felt for you."

"You'd so plain told me before, that you had no love to give me, Ruth. Nothing but your own words now, could do away what they'd made me believe then. I feared it was true—that you did not, and that you never could love me."

"I knew it not myself, that I should ever so thoroughly learn to look back upon what I then felt, as a mistake; and to comprehend that what I have since felt, was, in truth, love,—love founded upon esteem, respect, and gratitude."

"'Gratitude,' Ruth? That's out o' the question," said Ben.

"Gratitude," repeated Ruth. "What should so truly awaken gratitude, as constancy, patience, forbearance, and unshaken affection through all. Did you not love me constantly, through loss of health, loss of good looks, loss of self-respect? Did you not patiently give me time to recall my wandering fancy, to repair my false judgment, to redeem my wasted preference? Did you not deal forbearingly by my erring inclinations, and wait with faith and hope until they should revert to my own power, for fresh bestowal, and juster dedication? Assuredly, Ben, if ever woman had cause for deep gratitude towards generous lover, it is your Ruth. I know not how I may ever sufficiently prove that I feel the gratitude I cannot express."

"Shall I tell you how you may do both, in one little word, Ruth? Call me again 'dear' Ben, as you did just now; and let me see in your eyes that you mean to say it, what I couldn't

chen—like a dull blockhead as I was—understand or believe you did.”

The “dear Ben” was uttered in a style perfectly satisfactory to utterer and hearer; and then Ruth Field said something of the necessity of her returning home.

“I’ll see you back,” replied Ben. “I’m my own master for the rest of the evening. I got leave to come out for a few hours. Feeling restless, and not able to stay indoors, I asked it; little thinking who I should meet abroad.”

“One who has deprived you of your mastership and proprietorship; one who henceforth calls you hers,” smiled Ruth Field.

“That’s nothing new,” he answered. “I’ve long been more yours than my own, Ruth. But by this evening’s meeting, I have gained you to be mine; and that makes me a prouder proprietor than if I owned all England. At that moment, when I thought you cared for Miles Oatland, I’d ha’ willingly died rather than owed my life to him; now, I bless his hand that saved it for me, to give to you, in return for the life, the love, the joy you’ve given me.”

“Set your heart at rest, with regard to Miles Oatland. If Ruth Field had cared for him ever so well, he would have cared nothing for her, seeing that his whole world is contained in pretty, modest Lucy Chalkby. Do you know, Ben, that when you found out how pretty she was in tears, and how modestly appealing her sorrow made her to your kindly fancy, your Ruth’s fears took alarm, and she dreaded lest you might find Lucy’s prettiness and modesty more attractive than Ruth’s white, hollow cheeks, and limping stoop.”

“I shan’t tell you how dear the pale face and the feeble step have been to me, lest you try and keep ’em from turning into the rosier cheek and firmer foot, which have lately been Ruth’s again,” said Ben. “You’ve looked almost as bright, and walked almost as strong this evening, as you used, when we first came a-nutting in these very meadows, children together.”

"That is because I am as light of heart this evening as I was then," said Ruth; "and still more happy, Ben"

The adventure by the river-side had caused a great sensation in the village. Every mouth was full of Ruth Field and Ben Dimble's courageous conduct in saving Jessy Bligh; while Miles Oatland's gallant rescue of Ben, was considered in the light of a glorious achievement.

Miles enjoyed great popularity; he was good-natured, mirthful, social, and liberal,—both of money and of companionship. He was a general favourite; one of those young men of whom a neighbourhood is both fond and proud.

Kate Ireton took the opportunity, when public voice was loud in admiration, to call upon Mr. Chalkby, and endeavour to win his favour, and to stimulate his good opinion towards this suitor of Lucy's.

"Why, you see, Miss,—ma'am,—that this young man is all very well—he has a great deal of flashy reputation—mere convivial renown. But ma'am, he is not a man of talent; he has no genius; he's not an intellectual, or educated person, by any means. And it has always been my ambition, that a daughter of mine should show proper regard for talent, by allying herself with no person who has not given evidence that he possesses more than ordinary capacity. Now, Miles Oatland can sing a festive song; can dance all night at a wake, or an assize-ball; can hit a mark at an incredible number of paces; can shoot flying; can row like a Thames waterman, or a Cantab; can swim and dive like a dab-chick; and play cricket like a Lord's man; but I should like to know what signs of genius he has ever given."

"Why, really, Mr. Chalkby, it seems to me, that it must require the genius of an Admirable Crichton, to do all these things even tolerably; and I understand Miles Oatland does them superlatively," answered Kate. "*I think he's a very superior person,*" she added

"You think so, ma'am? Well, your opinion,—an instructress of youth, a highly educated and accomplished young woman yourself,—has great weight with me,—very great weight; and any one whom you may call 'a superior person,' has a claim to my consideration,—great claim. I attach immense importance to this, I assure you, ma'am."

"To a *name*," thought Kate. "My chancing to style Miles Oatland 'a superior person,' has produced the effect."

"It never struck me before, that Miles Oatland might be called 'a superior person;' but I suppose he might now, eh?"

"Undoubtedly," said Kate; "and a hero. If ever man deserved the name of a hero, it is Miles Oatland. His presence of mind, his noble bravery, his admirable skill as a swimmer, enabled him to achieve the proud and happy distinction of saving a human life. Presence of mind, bravery,—to say nothing of skill in natation,—are heroic attributes; and Miles Oatland is unquestionably a hero, no less by the testimony of his own deed, than by the unanimous suffrage of his fellow-villagers."

"Really, it would be no little honour, though, to have a hero for a son-in-law, and one, too, who is allowed to be a 'superior person.' I'll think of it. And if I can bring myself to put up with an unintellectual husband for Lucy, why it will be a comfort to me to tell her so; and put an end to those red eyes, and stifled sobs, and melancholy, unhappy looks, that have made her mother and me miserable for the last few weeks. I'll think of it; I'll think of it."

"You will be most wise to do so, Mr. Chalkby," said Kate; "and I shall rejoice to learn that you have determined to make Lucy, and her father and mother, and her lover, all happy, by one judicious, excellent step on your part."

As Kate Ireton left Mr. Chalkby's shop, she smiled to think of the way in which people are led by words, when they remain unimpressed by facts; of how frequently they will think nothing of substantial, positive good, until it be placed before them in the illuſively brighter light of talk and showy representation. She thought how often such people judge of others, not by intrinsic

merit, but by the estimation and value in which they are generally held ; and that, while true worth and actual qualification are either disregarded or little understood, the *name* of possessing certain attributes suddenly prevails to obtain due consideration.

She was pleased to think that she had in all probability smoothed the way to securing for Lucy Chalkby her father's consent to a union with her gallant lover ; but as Kate walked on, a saddened feeling crept over her, that she had much difficulty in struggling against. It was at such moments as these, that she most profoundly felt the loss of her uncle ; of him who had loved her so unfailingly, so intensely. She felt that she now comprehended Mrs. Lindon's words, how strong a necessity is love, to the human heart. It is its vital atmosphere, its nutriment, its most imperative need.

To love, and to be loved, form the highest privilege, as the first demand, of existence. So pressing a want are they, that even to love without being loved in return, is better than lack of either. Kate felt this, as she thought of her affection for Fernor Worthington. Keenly as she shrank from the belief that he regarded her with nothing of the sentiment she entertained towards him, she still knew she would rather harbour this preference than be without it.

It was a source of strange, hoarded joy, through all its bitterness. It exalted while it humbled her. It was a possession, ever while it made her sensible of her own insufficiency and imperfection. It afforded her a point of proud comfort, in the midst of her deprivation. She could take pleasure in the thought of his excellence, while she deplored her own deficiencies. She had a secret glory in thinking of his merit, at the moment she admitted her own inadequacy to equal his, or to inspire him with answering regard. It was something to treasure within her heart so noble a being as its admitted master. She would rather love unloved, than live without love at all. It was still love,—the natural element of the heart's life.

Kate was passing the vicarage, when she remembered that she would go and see her little friend, Harry Meadows ; who, from

being her uncle's godson, no less than from his own affectionate fondness for herself, was an especial favourite with her.

The child soon established himself on her knee, and assembled all his treasures to show her. He had a box in which he kept his most prized possessions, and these were now exhibited to his dear "Kaytighton."

She took up a pencil-case that lay there among the rest; and little Harry seeing it in her hands, exclaimed: "Ah! yes; would you believe it, Kaytighton? that's mine! mine for always! And I owe it to you, you darlinest Kaytighton."

"To me, Harry!"

"Yes, to you. I'll tell you all about it; the whole history how it happened. Mr. Worthington came one day, and I was plaguing him to lend me his pencil, and to make me seals, with the seal at the top; and he made me ever so many—oh! ever so many. I've got 'em all in this box. See here! Lots and lots of seals! And I asked him to let me make one for myself; and he told me I should burn my fingers; but that he'd make as many for me as I liked. And then I told him he was so kind, I loved him better than any body in the world, except one person. 'Mamma?' he asked. 'Oh! of course, mamma—and papa; I love them first of all; but best, best. There is one person I love best in the whole world!' 'And who may that be?' he said. 'Kaytighton!' I answered; 'I love her even better than you. What makes you get so red? Are you angry?' 'No; far from it,' he said. Then, after he had stopped a little, he went on: 'Harry, should you like to have this pencil for your own?' 'What! for my very own—to keep always? Oh, Mr. Worthington, it would be too, too delightful!' I really could hardly believe he meant it; but he did. He said it was for the sake of my favourite Kaytighton; and — he gave it to me."

Little Harry paused to take breath, after the immensity of this communication, and then, finding that Kate Ireton did not speak, he continued: "Well, I felt rather curious to know why, so I asked. 'But what made you get so red, sir?' And he

answered: 'Pleasure—pleasure that you know how to distinguish those who best deserve to be best loved. Kaytighton, as you call her, deserves to be better loved than I; she is better than I—than most.' 'I thought you were very good, sir,' I answered. 'Papa tells us you are a very good gentleman—an example, he says. He said once, he'd be quite content if his sons grew up to be such good men as young Mr. Worthington.' 'But Kaytighton is a far higher example,' he then said. 'I am, perhaps, not a bad man, because I've had few things to cross and grieve me; she has been a good woman through great trial; she has become even more good by her own care to make herself so. You can't have a nobler example, Harry, than your friend Kaytighton.' But what makes *you* red, now, Kaytighton? 'Pleasure,' too?"

"Yes; pleasure to think my little Harry has so good a friend as Mr. Worthington to teach him to think wisely and worthily; and pleasure to think that you got this nice pencil through Kaytighton."

"The only thing he made me promise was, that I'd not attempt to make seals with it myself; he said I might amuse myself by drawing with it as much as I liked, but I was not to make seals, without some careful person to help me, otherwise I should burn my fingers, and get him into a scrape with papa and mamma for having given me a dangerous toy. He said he'd believe my word, if I gave it him, that I wouldn't try to make seals myself."

"And you passed your word?"

"Yes."

"And have kept it, of course?"

"Yes."

"Then ask papa for a stick of sealing-wax, and I'll help you to make as many impressions as you wish."

And so Kaytighton and little Harry sat very happily, making seals together, seriously and carefully, trying not to make "kisses," and blotches, and blurs, and failures—but nice, round, even, neat impressions. And then he displayed more contents

of his treasure-box ; among other things, some sheets of paper on which Mr. Worthington had set him some writing-copies ; and Kate Ireton could not help noticing that there was a great prevalence of capital *K*'s among the examples.

Little Harry Meadows pointed out this circumstance to her, saying that Mr. Worthington had said it was fit he should know how to make correctly the initial of his friend Kaytighton's name.

The sight of that well-cut letter—flowingly, freely, yet firmly shaped, in his hand-writing—printed itself upon Kate Ireton's imagination. It kept her company through her dark way home ; it illumined her path, it shed brightness upon her spirits ; it hung, a star-like point, among the white dimity curtains of her cottage-bed, and formed a vivid constellation, in combination with two other initial letters, upon which her eyes had dwelt during the evening.

Kate Ireton's sleep that night was very sweet.



CHAPTER LIV.

LISTLESSLY, in pure indifference to any other course, Fermor Worthington lingered at the sea-side. He used to wander on the beach for hours together, endeavouring, by ceaseless exercise, and by constantly remaining in the open air, to throw off a portion of the languor and oppression that clung to him. He tried, by bodily exertion, to overcome the moral and mental weariness that he felt ; to combat the indisposition and inability to sleep which beset him, by a course of hardy, vigorous activity, and by personal effort, to conquer uneasiness of spirit.

One day, after a long ramble, he was seated at the foot of some rugged cliffs, holding a book in his hand, but with his eyes fixed upon the undulating billows, which rolled in never-ending succession, one over the other, and broke into perpetual same

ness, and vague aimlessness, like his own surging thoughts, when, round a point at a little distance, he saw a gay party of ladies and gentlemen, on donkey-back, laughing, chattering, and trifling as they advanced along the sands, in his direction.

Fermor took no notice of them, in hope that they would pass on, doing the same by him; but as they came near, a shrill, high-pitched, but languishing voice, exclaimed: "Dear mamma, how fortunate! There is Mr. Worthington."

The next instant he was surrounded by the party, who proved to be Mr. and Mrs. White, their daughter Alicia, with another lady and gentleman, whom they introduced as Mr. Henry Smythe, and his sister, Miss Constantia Smythe, whose acquaintance Miss White had made at Baden-Baden, when staying there with her god-mother, Lady Niggle.

"We were just looking out for a nice place to stop at, and enjoy our lunch," said Miss White. "You, Mr. Worthington, have determined our choice. The spot you have selected must be most delightful; and we shall have the pleasure of your company, in addition to the picturesque beauty of this nook."

Fermor had nothing for it, but to bow and resign himself.

While the servants who attended the party spread the repast, Mr. Henry Smythe, by way of conversation, addressed Fermor with—"Inceprethibly thoothing thight, thir, the then, ithn't it?" at the same time pointing to the object alluded to, with a little cane he held, and fixing his glass into his eye.

"Inexpressibly so, certainly, sir," replied Fermor.

"It alwayth mak'th me think of Thtorace'th thweet thtrain, 'Peatheful thlumbering on the ocean,'" pursued he.

"You speak of the sea in one of its aspects—as we behold it on a calm day like this, sir," said Fermor.

"Egthactly! Oh, when it'th bluthtering, and bounthing, and kicking up a dutht, in boithterouth weather, then we're reminded of our old Homer thehool dayth, eh, thir? 'Poluph thloithboio Thalaththeth,' you know! Then, it'th not thoothing but unthpeakably thublime, of courthe!"

"Unspeakably so, indeed, sir," replied Fermor.

"But even the sea can't be alwayth up to boiling-point, you thee, thir. 'Non themper tendit arcum Apollo,' ath we uthed to thay at that deuthed boring old Eaton. Thometimeth the thteam goeth down with the thea, as with uth all. For my part, I like motht thingth betht when they're thoft, and thill, and thweet. They're unutterably nithetht then, to my tathte."

"Unutterably, without doubt," assented Fermor.

"My dear Mitheth White," said the young officer, moving away from Fermor Worthington, and round to where Mrs. White sat, "I can make nothing at all of your friend. I tried to draw him out, but it wouldn't do. There'th no getting any converthation out of thome perthonth. Do what you will, you can get only monothyllableth out of 'em. I thuppothe, he'th one of your thuperior people—your thoughtful people. They're alwayth mere thtockth and thoneth—abtholute dummieth—either thtupid or thullen."

"Oh, dear, he's not stupid! He's one of the richest landed proprietors in our county!" said Mrs. White.

"Ith he though? Ah, then, it mutht be that he'th in the thulkth about thomething or other. Perhaphth he'th thtudying how he may get into Parliment; and that maketh him dull, and croth-grained, and cantankerouth, in prothpect."

"But Alicia is now speaking to him; and if any one can mollify his thoughtful mood, she will," replied Mrs. White.

"Unquethtionably; her thweetneth would thoften a polar bear!" returned Mr. Henry Smythe.

"What a sad break-up that was at Heathcote!" Alicia White was saying to Fermor. "The poor, dear old 'Squire! And poor, dear Kate! I really pitied her, poor thing! To such a fiery temper as hers, it must have been a terrible blow, her loss of rank and station."

"To say nothing of the loss of her uncle," said Fermor drily.

"To be sure! The way in which he humoured her whims was perfectly absurd, you know; she must have missed such doting indulgence as his, wretchedly. And then, to one of her proud disposition, it must have been gall and wormwood, to give

ap Heathcote Hall, and to exchange its luxury and ease for a poor cottage, the drudgery of teaching, and pinched means. I quite pitied her, poor creature ! ”

“ You were always compassionate,” said Fermor.

“ Oh ! I’ve no notion of being otherwise. I think it’s very hard and unfeeling to refuse pity towards any one who has fallen into reverses. They can’t help it, you know. It’s no fault of theirs. Still she might have been a little more humble in her altered condition. Mamma wrote her a very kind, condoling letter at the time, full of commiseration ; telling her that she might always depend on her countenance and patronage, in case she thought of attempting to obtain a situation as governess, or anything of that kind ; but, would you believe it ? she wrote back so grandly, holding herself so high and mighty, that we took no more notice of her after that.”

“ Of course you did not,” said Fermor.

“ I never quite liked her, even when she was at her best, at Heathcote Hall,” said Miss White. “ She had an oddity about her—a caprice and wilfulness of temper, quite disagreeable. She would be all arrogance and loftiness, one time—and all courtesy, another. What do you think of her coming to me, and making me an apology, of her own accord, after affronting me in that shamefully bluff, rude way, which you witnessed, the morning before you left ? ”

“ She made you an apology on that occasion ? ”

“ Yes—oh, yes ; came to my room, the last thing at night—said she couldn’t sleep or rest till she’d begged my pardon—and I don’t know what. The strangest girl, Kate always was ! I never could make her out, for my part. Hers was a character I could never understand.”

“ I don’t wonder at that,” observed Fermor.

“ No ; mine is so precisely the reverse. If there is a thing I pique myself upon, it is my absence of caprice and whimsicality. I’m always the same. What I am one day, I am another.”

“ A mirror of uniformity, an unruffled lake, a waveless sea, a perpetually smiling ocean,” said Fermor, mechanically, while his

thoughts were employed with the image of Kate's face, and picturing to himself how it looked while she was speaking her apology—that apology which she had refused to his urgency at the time, but had subsequently offered.

Miss White's statement of her own character, and Fermor's reply, had reached the ears of the rest of the company; and Miss Constantia Smythe rejoined, with her horse-laugh, "To some tastes, a bit of a tempest is more tolerable than a dead calm."

"Mith White ththriketh me ath more like a dairy-pan of milk thet for thkimming," said Constantia's brother. "Thuch a creamy thkin! thuch an innothent curdth-and-whey look about her. She theemth ath if she couldn't even drown a fly."

"But you should have seen Kate the morning after you left," resumed Miss White. "She gave herself fine airs; was in a perfect flurry and fluster, and left the room absolutely pale with anger, because the 'Squire read out your letter announcing your departure for the continent, which she chose to consider abrupt and uncereemonious. She scarcely deigned to notice my interesting news of being about to visit Germany; and did not even stop to hear the tidings of poor Mr. Lascelles receiving his mother's summons to return to India. She was in too great a passion to attend to anything but her own pettishness and proud vagaries."

Matty's account of that morning flashed into Fermor's mind. He remembered how she had described Kate's agitation, her almost fainting condition, as the nurse encountered her, leaving the breakfast-room on that occasion. With as indifferent an air as he could command, he made a slight remark, which brought a rejoinder from Miss White, making it clear beyond a doubt, that the news of Cecil's approaching departure for India, became known to Kate *after* her return to the breakfast-room that morning. While Fermor was lost in musing upon this, the conversation proceeded.

The name of Cecil Lascelles having chanced to meet the ears of Miss Constantia Smythe, she exclaimed, "La! do you know Cecil Lascelles, Alicia? He's an old flame of mine."

"Is he, Constantia? Yes, I met him at Heathcote Hall some time since. I did not know he was an acquaintance of yours."

"Oh, lord, ay; I was deeply smitten with him at one time. But I'm not going to wear the willow for him, thank you, nor for any man, I can tell you that."

"What, did he prove a false swain, then, Constantia? Did he leave you to go to India?"

"I can't accuse him of deluding me," said Miss Smythe with a loud laugh. "He never professed much 'tendre' for me. But I liked him; he was an agreeable rattlepate, and I had a fancy for him. But it hasn't broken my heart. I could hear of his marriage, t'other day, without hanging myself in my own garters."

"Fie, Constantia!" said Miss White. "How can you mention such horrid things?"

"Hanging—or garters, do you mean?" roared Miss Smythe.

"Hush! For shame!" simpered Miss White. "But, married, did you say? Mr. Lascelles married! I always thought he liked—but is he really married?"

"Yes; I heard it from the best authority. It'll be in the newspapers soon. I suppose the old lady, his mother, will be furious about it. She had a scheme for marrying him to some governor's daughter or other, over there. Instead of which, my young gentleman must needs fall in love on ship-board—long voyages are just the thing for falling in love—plenty of idle time, nothing better to think of—and so, soon after they landed, the wedding took place. The news has just reached England by private letter, and it'll shortly be known through the journals."

"And who was the young lady?" asked Alicia.

"The captain of the vessel's only daughter," answered Miss Smythe. "No great match, methinks, for a scion of the Wrexhams. But I'll be bound she was some chit with a pretty face that took Master Cecil's fancy. He was always in a flame for somebody. At Florence, he was over head and ears, for that what's-her-name girl, who went with us one day to Fiesole. Don't you remember, Henry?"

"Oh, you mean that thlap-dash riding girl, with a deuthed ththinging tongue of her own. A curthed thmart, thlthing wit she had, which thpared nobody. Ireton, I think her name wath."

"To be sure, Ireton; that's she."

"Curious! Did you meet Kate Ireton at Florence?" said Alicia White. "Tell me what you saw of her."

"Oh, well, she was the sort of established beauty of the party, that day. The men all took it into their heads to make a goddess of her. Lascelles stuck to her like her shadow; Byng was prodigiously struck too. But she was stone-blind to all their advances; stone-deaf to all their compliments, or took 'em as matters of course, not worth notice. She treated Lascelles as coolly as though he had been a three-year old husband. He was mightily taken with her; but I could see she didn't care one straw for him. Being rather smitten with him myself at that time, I should have been lynx-eyed if she'd shown him the least encouragement. But she didn't; she thought no more of him than of an old stirrup."

"Talking of thtirrupth, do you recollect the helter-thkelter headlong leap that girl took that thame day, Conthtantia?" said Mr. Henry Smythe.

"To be sure I do! And all for an old riding-whip! I never saw such break-neck work in my life!" returned Miss Constan-tia.

"Just like her!" said Alicia White. "She cared for nothing, when one of her whims was in question. And so she took a headlong leap after a whip, did she? Had she lost it?"

"Yes; it sprang out of her hand, and pitched down a precipice, and nothing would suit her, but she must dash pell-mell after it," replied Miss Smythe.

"Precisely Kate!" exclaimed Miss White. "No matter what trifle, if she had set her heart on it, have it back she would, at whatever risk."

"Did you chance to observe what kind of whip this was, Miss Smythe?" asked Fermor, in a low voice. "A foreign one, was it not? An elegant trifle, with an ivory handle?"

"Lord, no! An old-fashioned clumsy article, as ever you set eyes on," she answered. "A great silver-mounted thing—regular English—you might swear to it, a heavy, ugly concern, more like a man's riding-whip than a lady's. Yet this was what our

perverse damsel must needs all but break her neck to regain. She had a regular spirit of her own. Fine girl, but plaguy haughty and bluff. Splendid horsewoman, but deuced headstrong and wilful."

"She has had plenty to take down her spirit since," said Alicia White.

"You don't thay tho?" said Mr. Henry Smythe, adjusting his glass in his eye, and looking curiously at Alicia.

"Quite true; she lost her doting old relation, and with him fortune, station, everything. From being mistress of a fine mansion and park, she suddenly dropped to nothing—glad to hide her head in a cottage, and take a situation in a national school. Sad fall, wasn't it, for one of her temper?" said Alicia White.

"Therve her right! teach her to rein in her intholent wit!" exclaimed Mr. Smythe. "She could curb her thteed, but not her tongue. Now she'll have to give up horth-e-riding and her unbridled thpeecheth altho. 'Pon my thoul! I should thay, itthquite a providenthe!"

"Well, one might think it would have tamed her, but not at all. She's just as haughty, and full of her high notions as ever. She wrote a letter to mamma—I'm sure, from its tone, so free and independent (quite insolent, you know, from one in her situation—changed as it was), you'd have thought nothing had happened to take down her pride and her airs. Whereas, any one else would have been taught proper meekness, by such a reverse."

"And proper—or what is sometimes thought, proper—servility," said Fermor, in his quiet emphatic way.

"A certain degree of submission is surely becoming, in altered fortunes," said Alicia. "People should learn to know their place, and behave conformably, when fate has adjudged them a lower condition. For my part, knowing Kate's defect, I rejoiced, when I heard of her loss, in hopes it would be the means of curing her intolerable pride; I really did."

"You did?" said Fermor.

"Yes; although she never treated me well—was always insolent and disdainful, which I chose to bear with, for the sake of

her position then, there being a kind of relationship between us—yet I took sufficient interest in her, to be glad of her misfortune, out of a charitable wish that it should cure her faults.”

“Out of your charity, and not out of your bad heart,—you are sure?” said Fermor.

“‘Bad heart!’ What do you mean, Mr. Worthington?” gasped Alicia White.

“You are quite sure it was out of no malevolence,—no malignant desire to see her humbled? Out of no spiteful exultation at seeing one abased, who had mortified your consequence? As you say, the position which then induced you to endure her contempt, ceased; and you held yourself absolved from treating her with any farther forbearance. The relationship which then existed, of course existed no longer, when the wealthy young lady became the penniless school teacher, and you felt fully justified in treating her thenceforth as the nobody she had dwindled into. How should you, in your charitable disposition, see anything but cause for rejoicing, at this most providential ordering of events? I can quite understand your conduct throughout; it is worthy of you.”

“I don’t understand you, Mr. Worthington.”

“Possibly not. I will speak more plainly. Relationship is a strange bond. I cannot think poverty, wreck of fortune, loss of prosperity, ought to dissolve it. Much rather could I believe an abject subserviency, and cringing desire to ingratiate ourselves with those who might serve us, a cause for disclaiming affinity. Still more, do I feel malice, hardness of heart, and want of feeling, cloaked by soft protestations, silky words, and sugared professions, a reason for breaking through ties of kin, where there is no kindred sentiment. For my own part, I shall henceforth be content to acknowledge no relationship between myself and the heiress of Eggham Park; while one of my proudest boasts, my most honourable privileges, is, that I may claim to be the kinsman of the village school-mistress,—the noble woman who preferred working, and earning her own bread, to a mean and sordid dependence. Permit me to take my leave of affluent charitable

heartedness, since it knows not how to appreciate my cousin,— noble, admirable Kate Ireton. Good day to you!”

And, slightly raising his hat to the assembled party, Fermor Worthington turned on his heel, and left them.

CHAPTER LV.

No sooner was he alone, than all that he had by so singular a chance heard, recurred to Fermor in vivid, forcible reflection.

His heart melted within him at the thought of Kate's having made an apology that night to Alicia White. It so entirely satisfied his faith in the true excellence of her nature; it so completely confirmed the belief he had of her sense of right; it so thoroughly gratified the glory he took in her finer qualities of character. While he could not doubt that this act sprang from the effect of his own influence upon her, and while exultantly perceiving it, he at the same time accused himself of precipitancy, of insufficient patience with her, of too peremptory dealing towards one of her high spirit, and quick, sensitive temper. He arraigned his own cursory judgment, his own hasty conclusions, his own want of temperate consideration, and quiet abiding, which had prompted his abrupt withdrawal at that juncture. He told himself that he ought to have had firmer credence in her worth, and have waited more trustingly the developement of that true goodness which lay beneath the superficial perverseness and waywardness of her behaviour, and of which he had had many involuntary testimonies. He told himself that he ought to have known her genuine rectitude, and tolerated the temporary wilfulness leniently, considerately, since he had had opportunities of observing her tendency to make herself appear less excellent than she really was. He remembered how the proud, susceptible spirit shrank from praise, and was ever ready rather to disparage itself, than to put forth its claims to just applause. He now found that at the very

time she persevered in refusing to admit her intention of acting rightly, and while petulantly accusing him of tyranny in suggesting the course to her, she had really resolved upon doing what she felt and knew to be due, and had actually put it in practice before she slept.

This peculiar characteristic of hers, was farther corroborated by the circumstance of the riding-whip. She had, in fact, risked her life, for what she allowed him to think she had disregarded and lost, without one thought of its donor. However Fermor might be unable to account for the subsequent casualty of its dropping into the river Arno, he at all events could not but understand that she had cared for it sufficiently to imperil her own existence to regain it, when on one occasion it had been nearly lost; that it had accompanied her abroad, that she had carried it with her, had used it, and had held its donor sufficiently in memory to prize and cherish it.

“She had some tenderness for the Iron Cousin, at one time, —I must believe it!” was his passionate thought. “Ah, why did I not stay and learn the truth? Why did I rashly conclude her light speech betokened lightness of feeling? Why did I unjustly deem her capable of no profounder sentiment than indifference and disregard, because she was gay, and playful, and careless, in the mere brightness of an unshadowed youth? I might then have discovered that the Iron Cousin was distinguished, instead of stigmatized, by her pointed taunts; that they implied anything but scorn,—nay, a higher liking, a certain exclusive preference, which might have ripened into dearest regard. But I by my own ill-judged haste, neglected to discern aright, decided in all respects amiss, and left another to win that affection, which perchance might have been mine,—my glory and my happiness,—had I duly and truly understood her in her innocent subterfuge of captious behaviour, and sweet reserve of playful, wayward will. Her agitation, her perturbed emotion, that morning! It was not occasioned by the announcement of his departure, it seems, but by mine! dear, most beloved Kate! by the obtuse, inapprehensive Iron Cousin’s! Most cruelly is he punished. For, if you felt

this concern at learning his withdrawal, did it not leave you to be won into feeling still keener regret at parting with one who had thus the opportunity to secure you to himself?"

Neither of the accounts which Fermor had heard of that period's occurrences, afforded him any clue to the fact, that Cecil's quitting Heathcote immediately followed his own. His imagination pictured an interval, during which Cecil had doubtless had time to urge his suit, to plead his glowing attachment, to win his way to Kate Ireton's love; to address her uninterruptedly and unreservedly; to profit by the advantageous contrast he presented,—as an ardent, warmly-devoted, eagerly assiduous wooer,—with one who had coldly and blindly neglected to pursue the preferable impression which, from early liking and affectionate intimacy, possibly existed.

And then the pang was renewed with which Fermor had heard Matty's relation of Cecil's leave-taking. Again he writhed in anguish to think of Kate clasped in other arms than his own, pressed to another's heart, exchanging vows of faith and love with any other than himself.

And then, above all, came the recollection of the tidings he had heard. Could it be, that the man who was Kate Ireton's accepted lover, was false to his own pledge of constancy, to her plighted troth? Could it indeed be, that Cecil Lascelles was married? In the thought of what her grief would be, his own became merged. He felt that he could better bear his own disappointment than endure the thought of hers. In his burning indignation on her behalf, Fermor felt as though he could have set forth on a pilgrimage to India, to demand account of Cecil's behaviour to Kate. In resentment for his cousin's outraged affection, Fermor Worthington forgot that the woman he loved was released from the bond which affianced her to another. In his generous wrath, he lost sight of what more immediately touched himself. For her he felt, for her he grieved.

The sum of his reflections was an irresistible desire to return. He could not remain away from her; whatever resulted, near to her he must be. If he could not avert the blow, he could yet be

by her side, to break its force ; if he could not preserve her from its misery, he might nevertheless be at hand to sustain and console.

Animated by this thought, he left immediately ; he journeyed night and day, in order that he might, if possible, anticipate the chance of the intelligence reaching her suddenly, through a public channel. In the strength of his devotion to her, he resolved himself to be the medium of communicating it to her ; gathering courage for the task, out of a hope to spare her, by a softened and gradual relation of the tidings.

It demanded all delicacy, all fortitude ; but the Iron Cousin felt he should be inspired with both, thinking upon hers, which were to be guarded from this shock.

He arrived at Worthington Court late in the evening ;—too late to go then over to the village ; and he was glad to think she would have one more calm night's rest.

Upon his breakfast-table next morning, there lay a heap of letters and papers, that had accumulated during his absence. He seized them and tore them open, with a secret misgiving. One of the first things he read was a paragraph announcing Cecil Lascelles' marriage, among the latest news from India.

The words swam before his eyes ; and, for one instant, he paused. The next, collecting all his energy, he rose, rang the bell, and ordered his horse to be saddled without delay.

The interim he employed in endeavouring to arrange his thoughts and compose his manner. The whole period of his ride was dedicated to the same endeavour, and in trying to shape what he had to say in the least startling and least painful terms. The image presented itself of that unconscious face, in its serene beauty, which it was his appointed duty to cover with affliction, to bathe in tears, to plunge into distress and profoundest unhappiness ; and he could even now have shrunk from the office he had imposed on himself, had not the motives which first induced him to undertake it still prevailed. Swayed by these, he persevered, and kept on his way, at each step studying how he might best steady his own agitation and calm hers. Then a dread arose, lest

all his care should prove fruitless, and that the tidings might already have reached her. In that case, he felt how worse than vain would be all his efforts to tranquillize her; that then all he could do would be to let time work its own salutary effect, and leave her to its silent influence.

He approached the cottage as quietly as might be. The first sight he beheld, on looking through the screen of limes which ran round the small fore-court, and divided it from the village street in front, held him motionless. He saw Kate Ireton seated beside her old nurse in the cottage porch—Matty, as usual, immersed in her knitting, while Kate sat, her hands clasped together in her lap, her brimming eyes fixed on space, a fallen newspaper lying at her feet, and her whole air betokening that the fatal news had just been read.

Fermor recoiled. "She knows it! She knows it already!" was his thought.

He could not stay to look upon her grief. He could not encounter the agony of witnessing her emotion. He rode on slowly, wrapt in profound sympathy with her affliction; torn by ineffectual desire to mitigate its torture, to alleviate its anguish.

He wandered on, unable to quit her vicinity, yet incapable of intruding upon the sacredness of her sorrow in its first poignancy.

He was roused from his trance of thought by a young voice greeting him.

"Ah, Mr. Worthington, I'm so glad to see you! And on horseback, too! Now you can perform your promise of giving me a ride. Take me up before you, will you? and we can go home together. Papa and mamma will be so glad to see you—as glad as I am."

Fermor Worthington saw that it was his little friend, Harry Meadows, and remembering the promise he had once made him, leaned down and raised him to the saddle, although at that moment he could have well dispensed with the child's company and prattle.

"You keep your promises!" said the boy, delightedly. "So does Kaytighton. She kept her promise about showing me how she made the watch-spring open at the back. For a long time it was a wonder to me—oh, such a wonder! I didn't notice her thumb—that sly little thumb—where it pressed. It was so strange to me to see the back fly up, whenever I said certain names."

"'Certain names?'"

"Yes; she made a sort of play of it, and used to make me say, 'Open Sesame for mamma!' 'Open Sesame for papa!' At those, it always sprang up. Then, 'Open Sesame,' for the brothers and sisters; 'for Polly,' 'for Bella,' 'for John,' 'for Lyddy,' 'for Charley,'—sometimes. 'For Harry'—now and then; 'for Kaytighton'—very seldom. But, aha! I noticed that it always flew up at once when I said, 'Open Sesame for Mr. Worthington.' Do you know, I think Kaytighton likes you very much."

"Harry, should you like to have a watch of your own? A real watch—that you could wind up yourself, and tell the time by?"

"Should I like it? Oh, beyond anything—everything!"

"Well, I mean to bring you one, the first time papa tells me you have worked very hard at your Latin grammar."

"Oh, I'll work—I'll work! I'll fag at it, but I'll earn the dear little watch. And if you do bring me one, then I'll play with Kaytighton in my turn, and make her say, 'Open Sesame for Mr. Worthington!' But here we are at home, Let me run in and tell them what you promised me. And you must come in too. I want to show you my new batch of seals. Kaytighton made me dozens and dozens—*£. W.*, *£. W.*—as many as ever I liked. And she only asked one for her pains; and not even one of the new ones, but contented herself with one of the old ones out of the box—one of those you made for me."

"I dare say, you wouldn't grudge me one of the new ones, would you, Harry?" said Fermor Worthington.

"That I wouldn't! Have as many as you like."

"No; one will do."

"Ah! I know why you want it; you want to make a broad-seal from it, as you've given me the stamp."

As Fermor rode homeward, looking upon the seal she had made, thinking of the one she had asked for of his making, the child's words rang in his ears; "I think Kaytighton likes you very much."

"Likes me," he mused. "Ay, I do believe she has liking for me; I do believe she has regard, esteem, old liking for the Iron Cousin. Beneath all—in spite of all—I feel that she has a kindly preference, a gentle, friendly affection for me. Did I ever think to be content with 'liking,' with affection, esteem, regard? From her, too! Above, all, did I ever believe I could have been satisfied with *second* love? Yet, to be the object of Kate Ireton's preference on any terms, seems now to me worth all beside. Yes; strangely impossible as it seemed to me, when he once said it—I have come to feel that her bare liking would suffice me, would be dearer to me than aught the world contains. Might I but hope to win her loving preference, even now, after all that has passed, I should prize it beyond all blest possessions. Might I but hope she cherished for me but a faint shadow of what I feel towards her, I would welcome it as earth's choicest treasure; I would foster it into answering warmth by mine own fervour until it satisfied my craving for responsive, mutual passion. I would never rest until the iron nature, by revealing the latent ardour which glows beneath its cold exterior, awoke some degree of returning fire. And to have Kate's love! To have that generous, noble heart mine! To have it beat with but one of the thousand impassioned yearnings that now fill mine at the thought of her!"

As Fermor's spirit yielded itself to these lover's fantasies of fond day-dreaming, he saw before him, just in his path, but at some little distance, the figure of a woman in a red cloak.

She trudged on ploddingly, keeping the foot-way by the side of the lane, along which his horse was proceeding. It was not far from the entrance to his own park, the lodge-gate being almost in view. He was already on his own land, and a few of the cottages belonging to some of his tenantry, skirted the road.

At the gate of one of them, the woman in the red cloak stopped; and on turning round, at the sound of the approaching horse's foot, she discovered the face of Goody Johnson.

Fermor Worthington accosted her, made a few kindly enquiries after her own health, and then thanked her for having brought him some flowers during his illness, when he was lying sick of the fever at the hamlet hard by.

"Flowers, your honour! I heard of your accident, and heard you were not to be disturbed on no account. But I should never ha' done such a fool's trick as brought you flowers. If I'd had anything to bring, or if I could ha' got anything to bring, it should ha' been wholesome physic, not unwholesome flowers. There'd ha' been some sense in roobub, or magneeshy, or anything o' that sort; but flowers! No, no! Every fool knows that flowers in a sick-room is as bad as a draught o' cold water, or a draught o' cold air, when folks ought to be kept wrapped up and warm. I'd as soon ha' thought o' troubling your honour with a present of a bucket o' water as a nosegay o' flowers! Why, it's the most unhealthiest thing as is in a sick-room."

"Then, since you think so, Goody, thank you for not bringing it to me," said Fermor.

"Oh, you're quite welcome, your honour!" said Goody Johnson, dropping a curtsy, and retreating into her cottage with much complacency.

Returned to his own home, Fermor Worthington could not rest. He wandered from room to room, absent, sighing, and unoccupied. He could not settle to any employment; he could not remain in any fixed place.

He went into the library; but could not read. He went into

the morning-parlour ; but stood, lost in thought, opposite to the picture of his namesake sister—the painting which had so frequently engrossed the attention of her who absorbed his every idea. He looked at the cabinet containing the riding-whip which had been exchanged in playful, affectionate token of remembrance with her for one that, he now found, she had risked her life to retain. He tried to write, or study, in his own private sitting-room ; but there, he could do nothing but gaze upon the drawings—her drawings—that hung there, and think of the single sketch she had selected from among them, and ponder upon what motive had principally influenced her when she did so.

Smiling at his own wandering, uncontrollable mood of mind, his uncertain, purposeless condition, his inquietude, his gnawing anxiety, his frequent sighs, Fermor asked himself if this could be the Iron Cousin ? This irresolute, wavering, restless being, with trembling hands, and still more trembling heart ?

Starting up, he left the room, and strolled forth upon the terrace. The afternoon sun was pouring its golden beams full upon the tranquil scene. He thought upon the face he had beheld that morning—sad, mournful, unhappy. He thought of her attitude—sunk in sorrow, drooping, dejected.

He reproached himself with selfishness, in having shrunk from enduring to look upon her regret, when he should have stifled his own, and made an attempt to assuage and dissipate hers. He accused himself of remissness, of unkindness, of want of courage, of want of consideration, of failure in all that he should have done.

Suddenly, he decided. Hastily gathering a handful of beautiful moss-roses that grew in profusion on a bush near, and adding one spray from the clustering woodbine, Fermor took his way down the terrace-steps, and struck straight across the park, in the direction of the village.

CHAPTER LVI.

ARRIVED at the cottage, Fermor Worthington raised the latch and went in.

He found Ruth Field seated, reading. It was just the close of the midsummer holidays, and there was no school to interfere with the enjoyment of leisure.

In her quiet way, the sub-mistress rose to receive him, mentioning that his cousin had lain down for an hour, but that she was perfectly well, and would doubtless soon appear.

"It was I who persuaded her to lie down," said Ruth. "She learned some news this morning that agitated her—news both welcome and painful. The former was of a friend's marriage in India, she told me; and the latter, the sudden death of Mr. Weldon, the celebrated lawyer. He was an old and valued friend of her uncle's, and most kind to her in the crisis of her distress."

While Fermor's very soul drank in the import of what she had spoken, he contrived to utter something in an ordinary tone, commending Ruth for inducing Kate to rest, saying he would not have her disturbed, and should wait.

Then Ruth made gentle inquiry concerning his own health, and of the benefit she hoped he had derived from his sojourn at the sea-side. After a short conversation, in which Fermor Worthington bore his share by that mechanical power which enables speech while the mind is wholly occupied with other thoughts, he turned to the little table and absently took up the ivory-handled Florentine riding-whip.

"It is a most elegant piece of workmanship, is it not?" said Ruth Field. "Miss Ireton greatly prizes that whip for the sake of her uncle. It was his gift, she told me, to replace one she much valued, which was lost by accident in the river Arno. She mentioned it as an instance of his constant eagerness to gratify her; for having hastily flung away the whip she liked, because it had nearly perilled her life on one occasion, he got a friend, on

whose taste he could rely, to choose a new one for him to give her in its stead. It is a beautiful toy; but no wonder she sees a beauty in it beyond its own, reminding her as it does of the loving parent who made it his perpetual study to please her."

In the midst of the profound gratification that stirred Fernor's heart, he could not help thinking, with an inward smile, "How little that mild quiet Ruth dreams the content her few simple sentences, since my entrance, have conveyed."

While, perhaps, "quiet Ruth," in her heart, guessed more than he thought of what was passing in his; and perhaps—by an instinct which pertains to very quiet people, who are at once observant and delicate—she had long surmised a great deal more than he imagined, of what was passing there.

Be this as it may, she presently left him, and went up-stairs, in her own quiet fashion, to see whether Kate Ireton was stirring.

She found her risen, and smoothing her hair, after the slight disorder occasioned by the pillow; and "quiet Ruth" noticed that she was brushing it out into its long shining curls.

Kate spoke cheerfully and alertly, saying she felt much refreshed by her hour's rest, and thanking Ruth for having recommended it.

"Your cousin, Mr. Worthington, is below," said "quiet Ruth."

"I thought I heard a voice below; I thought I heard some one talking with you, Ruthy. I will go to him immediately," answered Kate.

"'A voice!' 'some one!'" repeated "quiet Ruth," smilingly, to herself.

And then, smiling still, in her own quiet way, "quiet Ruth Field" passed into Matty's room, leaving Kate to go down stairs by herself.

Irrepressible joy to see him again, mantled in her cheeks played in dimples round her mouth, and sat lustrous in her eyes

as Kate descended into the room, and advanced to meet Fermor Worthington. She looked even radiantly blooming.

No mortal save the one beloved, ever beholds a human face at its culminating point of beauty. Love, in the rapturous intensity of the passion, reveals a countenance at its zenith of perfection—a revelation reserved for one sole witness upon earth.

Fermor could not speak, but went forward, grasped her hand in his, and offered the fresh-gathered roses.

As Kate took them, she said playfully, "This is the way, then, you pass off your Worthington honey-suckle, among my favourite roses. True Worthington pride! The queen of flowers is to be but ancillary, forsooth, to the introduction of your lordly chosen blossom."

"You recognize it, Kate!" he exclaimed.

She did not reply, but turned away, and began to arrange the flowers in a glass upon the mantel-shelf. There was something in her attitude, in the raised hands, in their whiteness among the glowing-coloured blossoms, that recalled the vision of his illness.

"In my fever, when my delirium was at its height, I dreamed that an angel, a gentle spirit, in the form of an old woman in a red cloak, brought me some of my favourite flowers, a heap of woodbine from the study-window at my own Worthington," said Fermor, in a low voice.

Kate kept her position, without turning or stirring. Her back was towards him; but he could see so much of her white throat as was visible, become suddenly crimson.

Fermor's heart leaped to his lips at the sight.

He moved towards her; and, in the tone which always went home to Kate's inmost heart, he said, "The dream, the figure, was not less palpable than yours at this instant."

She attempted to rally against the overpowering effect of voice, words, and manner, by replying, in her old sprightly way, 'What if it were no dream, no other than the very figure itself—mine?'

"Were it indeed so, my delirious fancies then, would be noth-

ing to the mad visions I should indulge now, on finding that to be no dream, but a substantial beautiful reality. No wild thoughts of those moments could equal the rapturous waking truth which I am daring to picture to myself at this present one."

"And what may be the pleasant fact which your wanderings in sound health and sanity, and in broad daylight, are pleased to fashion out of the simple one of your cousin Kate choosing to come and ascertain for herself how the fever was taking effect upon the iron constitution."

"Shall I tell you, in so many words, Kate, what that 'pleasant fact,' as you call it, is?"

"As you will," she said. "I have often told you I had no curiosity. In my faultiest days, I was without that defect."

"And can you not guess?" he answered. "Can you not guess, that if I found it was indeed Kate herself who came to my sick room to learn whether the iron frame kept death at bay, I should conclude that she felt more interest in that stubborn material than she had ever been willing to acknowledge; that she cared for it, that she secretly prized it, that she tendered it no less dearly than, in the depths of its seeming cold, hard, stern nature, it tenders her. That she unconsciously cherished it, loved it, as, in all the strength, and fervour, and enduring constancy of its innermost core, it loves her."

As he concluded, he drew her to his heart; where hers gathered stillness from agitation, measureless content from passionate emotion.

At length, as she raised her eyes, they fell upon the figure of her uncle, in the little crayon sketch.

"*He* would have joyed to behold us thus," she said, softly.

"It is my happy pride to believe he would," returned Fernor. "His likeness was my chief comfort in seeing that picture here. Had it not been for its containing his portrait, I should have been less able to resist the jealous fancies and fears that beset me whenever I looked at it. You would wonder at my weakness, my folly, were you to know the hundred and one vague dreads my heart conjured up to torment me with, lest your love for Italy, your

associations with its past scenes, your predilection, your regret, your—I know not what—might have had the principal share in your bringing away that particular sketch from your old home.”

“While we are making confession of follies and fancies,” she said, “suppose I tell you why I brought that sketch of all others, from dear Heathcote. Do you remember the morning you found me out in my den?”

“Do I remember it, Kate? You ask me that?”

“Well, then, partly for the sake of my dear uncle’s likeness, partly for the sake of one who that morning seemed to take a strange fancy to this bit of drawing-paper, I brought it with me. All the while you were there, in the den, you—you held it in your hand.”

The reply to this—not spoken, but expressed with an eloquence of its own—made Kate say, in a tone of archness that scarcely veiled its tender feeling: “Do you remember, too, that morning, our standing together, looking at this sketch, side by side? So close, that I found a tumult in my heart which taught me to make good my retreat in time, lest it should, by some mysterious means, reach your knowledge, and betray to you more than its own mistress well understood at the time. How comes it, that an instinct prompted me to withdraw then, and that I now so recklessly remain? How comes it, that I used to complain of the Iron Cousin’s vice-grip of the hand, and now I trust myself so contentedly locked within the more formidable one of his arm?”

“Do you know, Kate, whenever you call me by that title in future, I intend to take my revenge on those lips for the many pangs their honied stings made me at one time endure from its repetition, with sundry fleers appended, which made me wince, and doubt that any liking could lurk beneath. Mind, I tell you this openly and fairly, that you may know the penalty you incur, whenever you name me thus again.”

“But what shall I call you?”

“Call me Fermor—let me have the delicious sound of my name from that mouth. I dared not allow myself the transport of hearing it, a short time since, when I dreaded my own courage

to resist the terribly potent-gentle effect it had to shake my heart from its vowed faith and honour to what I believed existed between yourself and Cecil."

"Cecil!" was the only word for which Kate's astonishment had voice.

"Cecil—Cecil Lascelles. I fancied that he was the powerful incentive to the self-reform and self-perfectioning which I beheld. I could perceive that some all-sufficing cause, some imperative motive, existed to work the change I witnessed. I could see that some softening influence had sprung up in that heart, to teach it its best wisdom, its truest strength, its natural greatness. How could I doubt that this influence must be love? And, from every thing by which I could judge, how could I doubt that this love—which the Iron Cousin would have perished to gain—was for Cecil? All that was left for me, was to turn the force and hardness of character imputed to me, into a strength of endurance which should enable me to sustain the perpetual struggle between my passion and my sense of right. Perhaps even your belief in the iron quality of my nature might be enhanced, could you know the trial its fortitude sustained, in beholding you constantly; in recognizing more fully on each occasion the genuine beauty of your character, developed in its truth of nobleness and gentleness by adversity and trial; in perceiving how unerringly I had always distinguished its real charm beneath the early petulance of youth and spoiling; in feeling this charm each day more subtly steal upon my heart, undermine its courage, vanquish its powers of resistance, and subdue it wholly to one single and over-mastering desire of possessing this matchless piece of tender womanhood for my own—my love—my wife. Could you have guessed an iota of the emotions that were perpetually warring within me, and assailing 'this poor citadel of man,' you might indeed have had some cause to call me the Iron Cousin."

"And how should I have guessed that he could be open to such attacks? I thought his heart made of sterner stuff—invulnerable, uninvadable, impregnable, invincible; above all, by any impression that his wayward, perverse, ungracious cousin Kate could

produce. I thought he knew her faults, contemned them, and well-nigh despised and disliked herself for their sake."

"He loved her but too well for his own peace, when she was most perverse and ungracious—most unlike her present gentle, womanly self, my Kate," he replied. "But how could he help adoring her, when he beheld her shine forth in her own natural grace and perfection—self-redeemed, self-perfected?"

"If it indeed be so, Fermor," she said, turning her eyes full upon him, beaming with affection and confidence, and grateful emotion; "if it indeed be that I am reclaimed from my own former unworthiness, it is, as you have said, that there was a powerful influence at work; the influence of——"

She hesitated; with a crimson cheek.

"I said it was the influence of love. You will not deny it, Kate mine?" he whispered.

"The influence of love," she repeated softly, yet firmly. "Love as strong as it was long unconscious. Love for,—not Cecil Lascelles,—but for Fermor Worthington. Throughout my life, ever since the moment I first beheld him, that life has been swayed slowly but surely, gradually but effectually, to its best happiness by the influence of the Iron Cousin."

"I gave you fair warning, Kate. Take the consequence!"

And here this story fitly ends: since the reader's imagination will hardly have failed to suggest how Miss Alicia White consoled herself for Mr. Worthington-of-Worthington-Court's closing explicit speech, by lending ear to the lisped "pretty speeches" of the gallant young officer; and by suffering them to win her consent that she would, all in good time, exchange her White of Egg—hamship for the style and title (in his own parlance), of "Mitheth Henry Thmythe."

Or how Ben Dimble received as a wife, "quiet Ruth Field," with a marriage-portion from the "grum brown purse;" and how they lived in the pleasant school-cottage together,—Ruth having been appointed head-monitress.

Or how Miles Otland swam into the good graces of Mr. Chalkby, on the tide of public opinion; and how pretty Lucy was permitted to marry the man of her heart, as "a young fellow considered to be a very superior person."

Neither will the reader's discernment have been at a loss to comprehend how Cecil Lascelles did but act in character with his constitutional susceptibility to present impressions, when he allowed his memory of Kate Ireton to become merged in the image of the fair young creature who chanced to be his fellow-voyager during the passage out. The constant companionship of shipboard, the familiarity and intimacy it promoted, with one whose vivacity, beauty, and undisguised partiality for his society, insensibly drew him towards her, combined to generate an attachment which consoled him for the hopelessness of that he had lately cherished. He had seen how irrevocably—although unavowedly, even to herself—Kate's love was given to Fermor Worthington; and Cecil learned to rejoice at having met with a woman whose fresh, ingenuous affections were his, almost before he had made an attempt to win them.

He wrote a letter to Kate, not long after his marriage, telling her that the friendship she had proffered him would, he knew, take generous delight in his present happiness; at the same time delicately expressing a trust that she herself might yet be enabled to send him like intelligence of her own.

By one of the earliest vessels that sailed from England, he received a warm reply, joyfully apprising him of his friend's mutual, full, and wedded content, signed—"Kate Worthington."

"When I agreed to have Fermor for a husband, I expected him to be my 'lord and Iron master,' as a matter of course, Cecil," she wrote, in one part of her letter, "but even in abjuring mastery, he contrives to have his own way. He has invented a method of making me dearly remember it, if ever I indulge in the old saucy epithet; so that I dare not now for my life—my lips, I mean—hint at calling him

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